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Dear Carter

I wanted to send you a book in which I have taken a certain interest along with your work like Mother Goose & I take my "hints" from what I find them + your genial and criticism + genial good nature tempted me to make me who did your work, talk my fate, who was to make his way solely by his work + by friends made through that work, no atom of influence or

Write to me here. As you will see by the enclosed the book is going well, & 2/3 of the reviews are good, with a few nasty ones, for which I am grateful. I hope when you read the book you will forgive my "white nothing" & believe me always

Yours faithfully

James Baker

I shall be up on Tuesday so we may meet

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A DOUBLE CHOICE

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A DOUBLE CHOICE

BY

JAMES BAKER

Author of
'The Cardinal's Page,' 'John Westacott,'
'The Gleaming Dawn,' 'By the Western Sea,'
'Mark Tillotson,' etc., etc.

'Is it idle to indulge in the fancy that the age of chivalry, which Burke declared was dead, might be brought to life again by a purified and ennobled Press, working not merely for sordid advantage, for petty rivalries, but for that general good which is to so large an extent placed in its hands.'—*Extract from an address of Sir Wemyss Reid*, 1899.

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1901

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TO

SIR WEMYSS REID, LL.D.

AUTHOR AND JOURNALIST

IN RECOGNITION OF HIS HIGH IDEAL

OF JOURNALISTIC WORK

THIS BOOK IS WITH HIS KINDLY PERMISSION

DEDICATED

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BOOK I

A DOUBLE CHOICE

CHAPTER I

THE NEW ARRIVAL

'WHAT is she like?'

'Well, she is young.'

'Not too young, I hope!'

'Decidedly young. Pretty. You will say flighty, I expect.'

'Then why did you engage her?' asked Mrs John Hawthorne of her husband, who was walking by her side.

'I really hardly know,' came the answer. 'Her recommendations were excellent, and when she came into my office I was taken aback with her youth—her dress, too.'

'Why, what is she like?'

'Fair hair, blue eyes, chubby, laughing face, and a straight-out look, and speech too, that seem to say at least she is honest.'

'It does not sound promising for half-a-dozen wilful children; like adding another to the number. What can she do?'

'Anything, according to her testimonials. Had we

not better stroll up to the house? She will be here directly if the train is fairly punctual.'

John Hawthorne and his wife were strolling along a rocky cliff path that looked out over the Western sea. Far out over the sea plain leaped wavelets of ruddy light, reflecting, as only that sea can, the intensifying hues of the flaming sky. All the heaven was ablaze with feather-like cloud forms, suffused in tender rose light, or glowing with fiery lines of molten bronze, that lent lurid beauty to the distant horizon.

'One of these all-clever book girls that one finds utterly useless, I expect,' said Mrs Hawthorne, as they turned their backs upon all this glory and passed up, through a field of deep red trefoil, towards a line of villas that looked out over the sea.

'Not a bit of it! She likes needlework, and even cooking.'

'Ah! I forgot; she's German!'

'Not exactly.'

'But that is what we are having her for.'

'She is English born of German forebears, but taken to Germany as a baby, and so speaks better German than English, and very good French.'

'And flighty?'

'To look at, very. She had obtained a first English engagement at a school where they were not kind to her, and she was leaving, and so she was free to come at once.'

'This does sound comforting. How was she dressed?'

'Oh, don't ask me. See, there is a cab winding round the hill from the station; we shall be just in time to receive her, and you can judge for yourself.'

John Hawthorne had come down from the city of Greyborough to his wife and family at the seaside, and had engaged this new governess to be a teacher of his children and a companion to his wife.

As they reached the garden gate of their country residence they were met by a little troop of youngsters, all ruddy and bronzed, full of life, bubbling with animal spirits.

With a tumultuous rush they seized upon their parents' hands, and the youngest, a chubby mite, put up its arms and was caught up by its father, and given a toss in the air, and then handed over to a maid, who appeared on the lawn, as the sound of wheels slowly approaching made him say, 'Take the children in at once or they will frighten their new governess.' But ere he had said the words the cab had stopped, and out jumped a little *svelte* figure, and up the steps she came, and was standing before them awaiting Mr Hawthorne's recognition.

Almost before he advanced to greet her she held out her hand, her face lit up with smiles, and her hand lingered in his until he handed it on to his wife's outstretched hand with the words,—

'This is Fraulein Hilda Jordan, whom I am sure the children will like.'

'Do you really think you can manage so many as six?' asked Mrs Hawthorne, doubtfully; then, regretting this greeting to a stranger, she added, 'But you must be tired after your journey. Let your trunk be taken in and I will show you your room. Then we will have some tea, and you shall see the children.'

'Ah! I see them now. Come, let me kiss you,' and out trooped the children, who had been peeping

from the door; and the youngest ones swarmed round their new teacher, whilst the elder slowly and shyly shook hands with her.

'You won't scratch, will you?' said one of the youngsters, a fat roly-poly child of five.

'Scratch! No, you will kiss us good, won't you?' said a smaller mite holding out its arms to be taken up.

Hilda Jordan lifted up the child, who threw its arms round her neck and nestled its face to her cheeks, and the other children clung round her as though she was an old friend instead of a new governess bringing recollections of a fiery, passionate South German who, in her paroxysms of passion, had once or twice dug her nails into the children's flesh; hence the question of the girl of five—'You won't scratch?'

Mrs Hawthorne looked on in wonder at this scene on the lawn. The child instinct seemed to say this was a friend, but how about discipline and lessons? But she stopped the little ones, who all now wanted to be kissed, with 'Come, children, let me show Fraulein Jordan her room, and let her come in with us for some tea, then she shall talk to you.'

Over the tea Mr Hawthorne talked with this almost childish girl, and was surprised at the quick answers in the somewhat broken English, betraying a knowledge, varied and yet thorough, in the literature of England and France, as well as her own country, for her tongue and manner were far more German than English.

Then Mrs Hawthorne gently catechised her on household matters, and was comforted greatly in that

this new governess seemed not to disdain such material matters as cooking and needlework. She was bright, vivacious, and free from *mauvaise honte.* Now and then her free laugh rang out through the room at some blunder of her own.

'What did this singular freedom portend?' asked Mrs Hawthorne quietly of herself. 'Did it mean riots in the schoolroom, utter inattention to order, and another change almost at once?'

That night when the house was all quiet and the new governess had long gone to her room to set it in order, and place in it her own belongings, Mrs Hawthorne went quietly to the door to see her alone, and to tell her the order of the day in their household.

She tapped at the door but there came no answer. Again she tapped, but as there was still no answer she entered. The great travelling trunk was standing open, and she could see no one, but she saw the table was covered with books and photographs; she went quietly nearer and saw the volumes of German classics, of Schiller, and Lessing and Goethe, and nearer were a pile of old school-books worn and marked; she looked round the room, and near the trunk, behind the great lid, in a low chair, was Hilda Jordan, her head thrown back, her hands clasped in front; tears had been chasing each other down her cheeks, and bright drops still stood beneath her eyes; her face was tired and pale. She was asleep.

In her lap lay open some old copy-books filled with most elaborately and neatly-written poetry, with tiny notes in the neat margin. Mrs Hawthorne's heart was touched at this so vivacious girl

bringing out, as soon as she was alone, all these mementoes of her old school and home life. She turned softly from her to the table and opened one of the bigger books lying there; it was a volume of universal history, all scored and annotated in the most minute fashion. Every page of this ponderous volume seemed to have been studied minutely. Near it lay a tiny red volume of poems, and between the books stood photographs of friends and of scenes in Germany.

Mrs Hawthorne turned again and looked at the young girl; she was but a child, perhaps eighteen, very young, and she was alone, without a friend near her. As she looked she saw her hands open, and they were held out palms upwards, as though pleading for help. Mrs Hawthorne stooped down and kissed her forehead and smoothed back her hair. She murmured something in German.

'Come, my child, you are tired. You must not sleep here. I came to say good-night.'

'I knew you would kind be to me. The old books, the old books, they make me so sad sometimes,' and she took up the old copy-books from her lap, and standing up, placed them on the table. Then, with a strange, sudden impulse, threw her arms round Mrs Hawthorne's neck and kissed her passionately, repeating, 'I knew you would kind be to me.'

Mrs Hawthorne's reserve was melted; she took the girl's face in her hands. The tears glittered in the bright blue eyes that looked fully into hers.

'You must feel lonely so far from home and friends. You must make this your home; confide in me in all things. Good-night, now; forget your books, and,'

she added, pointing to the bed, 'that is the place for sleeping.' And with a kiss on her forehead Mrs Hawthorne left her.

When she was again with her husband she said, 'That child has a singular magnetism about her; I hope it will be for good for the children. She seems to me to be truth probing for truth.'

'She will find some queer things, though, if she fishes up truth everywhere in this little community,' said her husband.

The half village, half watering-place of Netherleigh-on-Sea was full of rivalries, and cliques, and tiny jealousies; as said the Scotch preacher of Nazareth in old times, 'It was nae too large for neighbourly disparagement.'

CHAPTER II

A SUNDAY STROLL

INFORMATION upon the inner home life of the dwellers in Netherleigh travelled as rapidly and mysteriously throughout the whole community as the news in Eastern countries flies through a whole district *viâ* the bazaars.

It was quickly known that the Hawthornes had a new governess, a chit of a girl who appeared on the cliffs in a blue dress and a white blouse and wide straw hat, and the young rebels of children, that had sent three teachers nearly mad within a year, all liked her!—actually did as she told them.

All the young men of the place asked each other if they had seen her, and the old ones strolled out westwards in the hopes of meeting the Hawthornes, to see if the report of the young men as to her prettiness was true.

It was upon a Sunday afternoon, not a month after her first appearance in Netherleigh, that she was racing through the fields near the low line of black cliffs with four of her young charges; her hat was swinging in her hand and she was singing snatches of German songs as she ran, or halted when she gave up trying to catch the children. They were approaching a thick clump of trees with a rich close

undergrowth, and into this the children suddenly dived.

She stopped on the edge of it expecting them to reappear, but suddenly she heard one of them cry out, 'Come, Fraulein, come and see such a pretty picture; he says you may.' But she still halted, when trampling through the brake came little Bobby, the boy who had cried out, a little chap of seven years' growth. 'Oh, such a pretty picture! We said you would come.' He took her hand and dragged her in, over the trampled undergrowth, until she came to the edge of the cliff, and there were her charges grouped around a canvas, before which a young man was sitting. 'Such a pretty picture, ain't it?' said the child.

'If all my critics, when I get any, are only as good-natured,' said the artist, rising from his seat as he saw the young girl come through the low bushes.

'Oh, these naughty children ought not so to disturb you, sir!' she said.

'Oh, they know me. Mr Hawthorne's children and I are good friends, aren't we?' He patted the eldest little girl on the head.

'But ain't it a pretty picture?' insisted Bobby, dragging her nearer the easel.

It was a pleasant sketch of the broken shore, and the tawny sea, white foam-crested, rolling in.

'But why do you paint on Sunday, in England?' suddenly said the young governess with blunt decisiveness.

A red flush spread swiftly over the face of the painter, but he as bluntly answered, 'Because Sunday is my sole day of rest.'

'But no one works on Sunday in England.'

'This is not my work. I have work all the week; this is my calm and rest. I am at peace here.'

As he spoke, Bobby rushed to catch a butterfly that floated past into the wood, caught his foot in one leg of the easel and sent all toppling over. Hilda clutched at the canvas and the artist jumped and saved the easel, just as there came round the corner, from the other side of the cliff, Mr Hawthorne with an old clergyman.

The youngster lying in the bushes, the young girl holding the picture, and the artist the collapsed easel, explained the situation, and the solemn tones of the old clergyman ejaculated,—

'The child, you see, inadvertently says you should not labour on the Sabbath, Mr Lowther. More harm has come to the child than the picture, but see he is not hurt.' He had turned himself over and was sitting up laughing at his tumble. 'You must thank the young lady, for I see she caught the picture,' said the clergyman; then turning to Mr Hawthorne, he added, 'Is this the young person of whom I heard Mrs Hawthorne speaking?'

'Yes, this is Fraulein Jordan,' said Mr Hawthorne.

The old gentleman put out his hand, but her hands were still holding the canvas whilst the artist was putting up his easel, and so she could not accept the proffered hand.

'I trust your work will have a blessing on it; the training of the young is of incalculable moment to the nation. You are very young to have left your own country, are you not?'

'I am not very old,' said Hilda, bubbling with mirth at the strange question.

'Older in knowledge than in years,' said Mr Hawthorne; 'but how did you get here? And what has just happened?'

'I dragged Fraulein through the bushes and I knocked over the picture,' said Bobby, 'and those stupid, stupid children didn't help.' Mr Hawthorne took the picture from her hands and handed it to the artist.

'I am afraid Fraulein has not improved your sky,' he said, as the artist took the light canvas from him.

'Your clouds are on my fingers,' said Hilda to the young man, 'but that matters nothing.'

He looked at the picture; there was the impress of a hand in the sky where a cloud had floated amidst the blue. Swiftly the idea passed through his mind—cloud forms assume all shapes; why not a hand? If the picture should ever be exhibited, at least that would make it talked of. Could he model the form so that it was both cloud and hand?

He quickly bound together easel and stool, and with these in one hand, and his smudged canvas in the other, turned to walk back with them.

The Rev. Josiah Cubberley looked at easel and canvas uneasily as he turned with Mr Hawthorne to continue the walk round the cliff, not through the thick wood as the youngsters had led their governess. How account to his deacons for this consorting with the Sabbath-breakers should they meet him? Suddenly he stopped in his walk, saying, 'I must take the near cut, Mr Hawthorne, for I am not quite prepared with my evening's discourse; you will be following the cliff path, but I must just say one word of warning to our young friend.'

'Better say it to some of your deacons,' said John Hawthorne.

'We are all sinful, but I would not be doing my duty, as I have met him, did I not strive with him in some way,' and he halted until the children and Hilda and the young artist drew near, one child taking hold of the artist's coat sleeve and walking with him, for his hands were full, another holding Hilda by the hand, and two others romping behind, picking flowers and chasing butterflies.

'I must say good-bye, Fraulein Jordan, as I leave Mr Hawthorne here. You have a holy task, this training the young; may God bless you in it,' and he held out his hand, and this time Hilda placed her round chubby hand in his. He held it, and then placed his other hand upon it as he turned to the young artist.

'See how you may influence those dear children. They see you working on the Sabbath day, and thus to them it loses something of its holy calm and peace.'

'Oh, they have been quite quiet since they saw this gentleman,' said Hilda; 'Master Bobby here especially.'

'Perhaps your influence sways them; I feel sure it will ever be for good,' and with a gentle pressure he let go her hand—a pressure that, she knew not why, sent the blood rushing to her face, and she turned away with an annoyed feeling as she heard him say,—

'This using the Sabbath for secular labour is wrong, my young friend.'

'You would not object to my sleeping on Sunday

afternoon, or picking holes in my neighbour's morals. I have to work all the week, Mr Cubberley, and to me there is no greater calm, no holier peace than this striving to see into Nature's inmost beauties. The marvels of the universe become to me more wondrous.'

'But you are distinctly breaking the Sabbath and perilling your soul ; it is my duty to warn you. Good-bye, think over my words,' and without proffering his hand he turned away and was soon climbing the hillside.

Two children had run on to their father, but the other two still clung to the young artist and their governess, who soon joined Mr Hawthorne, who was awaiting them.

'Mr Hawthorne,' said the young man as he neared him, 'what do you say to my choosing some quiet spot and striving to carry away the beauties of it with me on canvas on a Sunday? You know my life—at work in a shop all the week from eight in the morning until seven at night. Am I doing wrong? Mr Cubberley there says I am.'

'You are doing less wrong than many of Mr Cubberley's flock. I admire your choice of Sunday amusement ; but mind, I do believe in a non-working Sunday, but I like your taste, and I liked that picture, if Miss Jordan there had not left her imprint on it.'

'Oh, I am so sorry!' cried Hilda. 'But if I had not caught it, perhaps over the cliff it would have flown. Pray, please, forgive me.'

'Say rather, thank you for saving it,' said the young man. 'It may be the beginning of a new life, that picture, if Mr Hawthorne really likes it.'

'Oh, I was not flattering! Let me look at it again. Yes,' he said, as the young man held it up, 'you do seem to have caught the spirit of the spot; the sea is alive, the sky is full of light—oh! that unfortunate hand. Fraulein, Fraulein, you have spoilt Mr Geoffrey Lowther's picture.'

CHAPTER III

AN HONEST MAN

THE Rev. Josiah Cubberley was minister of one of the half-dozen Dissenting chapels in Netherleigh that provided places of recreation for the youth of that village on Sabbath evenings. The congregations were not so large in the mornings, but chapels flourished in Netherleigh, for the Church living was enjoyed by a most eccentric gentleman, whose idea of church work exemplified Tennyson's words:—

> 'But a reäds wonn sarmin a weeäk,
> An' I 'a stubb'd Thornaby waäste.'

He buzzed and boomed over their heads for thirty minutes by the clock that ticked over the west gallery, enlivening his congregation by queer announcements. When the winter evenings were coming on he would halt before going into the pulpit and say,—

'Now, my friends, the winter is coming on, and if we are going to have evening service we shall want lights—candles; they will have to be paid for. Now, unless you say the game isn't worth the candle, we'll have a collection next Sunday for lighting the church this winter.'

If he wanted to speak to one of his congregation he would slip down out of his pulpit after giving out the hymn. On one Sunday morning, after announc-

ing the hymn, he looked over the pulpit and saw just beneath the two daughters of a wealthy farmer of the district. He laid down his hymn-book, came down the pulpit stairs and into the farmer's seat.

'You have never been confirmed, have you?' he said to the girl nearest him. She shook her head. 'I'm going to drive over to the Bishop's on Tuesday with Miss Courtenay, who is to be confirmed; you had better come along too.' This off his mind, he again ascended the pulpit steps quite in time to say, 'Let us pray.'

His curate was of an opposite type: talked much of 'the Church,' wanted to introduce all sorts of innovations—in fact, as is common with curates, wanted to lead his vicar rather than obey him, obey being so obnoxious a word to the general clerical mind.

But the Rev. Nicholas Dawne, B.A., found the Rev. Paul Shannon, M.A., not easily led as rectors and vicars should be, and generally are, by their curates.

Society in Netherleigh was recruited by some well-to-do merchants from the neighbouring city of Greyborough, and at the house of Mr John Hawthorne might often be met some of these new richer dwellers in Netherleigh, and some of the poorer original settlers in that sea-coast village.

And to all these the presence of Hilda Jordan became a subject of brisk talk. Her youth, her prettiness, her open manners with Mr and Mrs Hawthorne, and her hearty, ringing laugh were all discussed.

Ere she had been in the village a couple of

months she had been seen strolling through the fields over the hillside in earnest talk with the Rev. Nicholas Dawne; and the Rev. Paul Shannon had been seen halting for quite a 'little half-hour' at Mr Hawthorne's gate whilst Hilda Jordan was holding it open for him to pass out.

And it was noticed that the Rev. Josiah Cubberley had frequently matters of moment that necessitated his calling upon the Hawthornes.

John Hawthorne's business affairs gave him but little time in this seaside home; but he was somewhat astonished to find that his wife made no complaints of this young governess, and on questioning his children he found they had been taken back to the very beginning of their studies and had been made to strengthen all their weak points. 'Oh!' said Bobby, the irrepressible, 'don't she make lovely Kuchen?'

'Why, something fresh, Bobby?' said his father.

'You didn't have none to-day,' chimed in Edgar, a still younger urchin.

'No, but I'll have some to-morrow.'

'So she makes you cakes and you get none if you are naughty, eh?'

'She don't scratch,' said Bobby.

'No, she kisses us when we are good,' said Ruth, an elder sister, as though these kisses were a real reward.

They were all on the lawn waiting for Mrs Hawthorne to join in an evening stroll. At last she came, carrying in her hand a delicate handkerchief, which she held forth to her husband, saying, 'Is not that pretty? See how beautifully that monogram is worked.'

'Beautifully done. Who sent it you?'

'No one; Fraulein is working that on all my handkerchiefs, and teaching the girls to knit.'

'Where is she now?' asked John Hawthorne.

'Oh, Midge won't go to bed unless she hears her say her prayers.'

'So she is putting Midge to bed, eh? What else does she do?'

'She does not mind doing anything. She would do the servant's work if a girl was ill, I believe, and make us enjoy her doing it. Did you know Bobby had a crying fit the other night?'

'He generally wakes the whole house.'

'Well, Fraulein heard him at once, ran up to him, and the maids say he was quieted immediately.'

'He must have been, for I did not hear him. And yet she seems clever at books.'

'Oh, she is. You must see her old lesson-books all scored and noted with minute care; her diplomas are excellent.'

'Will she stay?'

'I hope so. She is doing some lovely needlework for the *fête;* it will be the talk of the place.'

'For your stall, of course?'

'Yes,' said Mrs Hawthorne, slowly; 'but Mr Dawne has seen it, and brought a message from the vicar's wife asking Fraulein to do something for her.'

'Oh, talk of the . . . and here he comes; and with that effeminate little Busteed, a man whose money has emasculated him. Don't ask them in.'

This was said in an undertone, for the two men

were at the gate, and Mrs Hawthorne went down the lawn to meet them.

After shaking hands with Mr Hawthorne, the effeminate little Busteed, as John Hawthorne had dubbed him, came up the lawn just as Hilda Jordan came out upon the verandah above. He was very slight and very fair; thin, flaxen hair came from beneath his hat, and as he lifted it you saw it was carefully spread over the top of his head to hide away baldness; his voice was thin and reedy; he wore that badge of good society and the draper's counter, a frock coat, and in his carefully-arranged scarf twinkled, in the sunlight, the coruscations of a goodly diamond; and on one hand—that, unlike the other one, was ungloved—sparkled and glowed diamond, ruby and emerald rings. As he raised his hat to Hilda, whom he quickly espied, these glittered in the sunlight, and in his other gloved hand he carried a polished cane, on the head of which was a large silver dog's head.

Fraulein Jordan came down the step as this well-dressed figure advanced towards her.

'You know Miss Jordan?' said Mr Hawthorne.

'Oh, yes, your children introduced me on the cliff walk; I said it would not be long ere we met again.'

'Oh, what a lovely cane!' exclaimed Hilda, as she saw the stick he carried. 'Would not Midge like to play with it.'

'Midge!' exclaimed Mr Busteed. 'Why, it is silver, and you see the eyes are rubies. It is very valuable.'

'What an unpleasant thing to travel with,' said Hilda, handing it back.

'I wonder you are not afraid to carry it about,' interrupted Mr Hawthorne.

'Oh, but you see, when I leave it at the club or anywhere I take off the head—see, it unscrews—and I put it in my pocket.'

'What a worry!' exclaimed Hilda.

'Think what a worry it would be if I left it in the hall,' said Mr Busteed, as he raised his ringed hand to his cheek that the flashes from the jewels might aid his wit.

'Do you unscrew your hands? You must fear to lose those lovely rings.' But as she spoke the Rev. Nicholas Dawne approached her, saying,—

'I have a most urgent message that you will try and do at least something for Mrs Shannon. Mrs Hawthorne has given her permission if you can but find time.'

'But all my work is for Mrs Hawthorne.'

'Perhaps you might find time for at least something for Mrs Shannon.'

'But I know not Mrs Shannon.'

'It is for a good cause,' pleaded Mr Dawne.

'I know not even the—the cause.'

'But you know me.'

'Ah, Mr Dawne, you want no baby clothes. They are such little things I make for Mrs Hawthorne.'

Mr Dawne was discomfited, in fact, blustering, whilst Hilda Jordan was looking straight out at him from her blue eyes, as insouciant and free from *mauvaise honte* as a child of three. What was it made him turn sharply upon Mr Busteed, who came up to interrupt him, saying, 'I must not keep my servants waiting.'

'No, of course not. Good-bye,' said Mr Dawne, curtly.

'But I thought you were coming.'

'Not now, not now.'

'Then good-bye, Miss Jordan. I should so like to show you my silver plate; it is very rare—quite rare. You must call when passing with the children.'

'They would want something on the plate,' said Hilda. 'Oh, do take care of that lovely cane! Would not Midge like it!' She took it suddenly from his hands and kissed the dog's head, exclaiming in German, '*Es ist wirklich schön.*' Mr Dawne was annoyed at the man and his cane, and his face resumed its ordinary pallor as he turned and said to Hilda, 'We have kept you so long from your walk; see Mr and Mrs Hawthorne have walked on. I must apologise to them.'

'Then I cannot be late for my dinner,' said Mr Busteed.

'Certainly not. Good-bye,' answered Mr Dawne. Then turning to Hilda, 'I must speak to Mr Hawthorne. Shall we go on together? Mr Busteed is anxious about his dinner.'

'But certainly,' answered Hilda.

'La femme qu'on préfére
C'est toujours la cuisinière.'

'You are hard upon Mr Busteed,' said the Rev. Nicholas Dawne as they passed out of the gate, a striking contrast, the fresh-coloured chubby cheeks of this blue-eyed fair girl and the thin white face and dark eyes and straight black hair of the embryo priest. A face growing into, but not yet having attained, either the sensual thickness or the thin

pallor of deception so common to priestcraft. Into which would it develop? Or would honesty of life save it from both of these developments?

'What!' said John Hawthorne, as they approached, 'has Mr Busteed left you?'

'Yes, and I must be turning back,' replied Mr Dawne, 'but I felt I must apologise for detaining Fraulein Jordan so rudely. She tells me plainly she does not know Mrs Shannon and all her work is for you, Mrs Hawthorne.'

'Fraulein hardly knows the subtleties of our English speech yet; you must excuse her apparent abruptness.'

'Oh, but it is so honest; I do so like honesty.'

'*Vraiment!*' muttered she of whom they spoke *sotto voce;* but he that had evoked the remark heard it. Was it sarcasm? Was it inquiry? It sent the blood tingling through his veins, and his face was again suffused with colour as he said, 'Oh, by-the-bye, you will be glad to hear your *protégé*, young Geoffrey Lowther, has given us two sketches.'

'Not my *protégé*, but I admire the man's pluck and his work. But can you accept them? The Rev. Josiah Cubberley says Lowther commits a crime in painting them on Sunday.'

'The fact of his giving the result of his work to so good a cause almost hallows it. He cannot paint all his pictures on Sunday.'

'He has little other time, save Saturday in the afternoon. Perhaps you do not know that man is at work the whole week from eight to seven, yet finds time to study literature and art, and will, I believe, make a name in one or the other.'

'I did not know he dabbled in literature.'

'Dabble! no; he dives into it and swims in it; no dabbling with finger-tips with him. If you read anything about art in the local papers it is probably his.'

'But what time can he give to it?' asked Mr Dawne.

'Well, with art, as you know, he is occupied all day; he sells pictures for his employers; and yet, although he sees the weariness of life of the struggling artist, he has the pluck to strive to become one himself, and I believe he will succeed; and he reads immensely; it is a pleasure to talk with him.'

'But no one seems to know of him.'

'You have asked him for some sketches? Local honour generally commences, if it does not end, in being asked for something.'

'You are sarcastic. But you make me want to know your prodigy, if not *protégé*, and he will be down here for this *fête*, for his employers are lending us a gallery of pictures that he will help to sell.'

The two men had been left alone in this talk, for Mrs Hawthorne, with Hilda and the children, had strolled onward.

'Get to know him,' said John Hawthorne, 'and help him.'

'I shall always be glad to help a friend of yours if I can.'

'No, no; not because he is my friend, but for his work—for his example's sake—for your own sake.'

The Rev. Nicholas Dawne shook hands with his friend and turned to go his own way. What made

him feel so uncomfortable? Why did that girl's '*Vraiment!*' seem to cling about his brain, and this emphatic 'For your own sake' of John Hawthorne's? The girl's laughing eyes and this '*Vraiment!*' seemed to probe his very soul. Honest! He was honest.

CHAPTER IV

A VILLAGE *FETE*

NETHERLEIGH-ON-SEA was gay with flags and flowers; even the little railway station had burst out into blossom amidst boughs of evergreen.

This *fête*, that had so long been prepared for, was to last three days, and, if successful, much was to be done to the church; even a new heating apparatus might be provided that would cut out for ever the vicar's facetious announcement about the warm corner by the stove and sleepiness.

The stalls were to be presided over by the chief residents of Netherleigh and some great people from Greyborough City. There were to be dramatic performances by the 'Thespian Circle' of Greyborough, a body of amateurs famous through all the West Country; and the 'Lousiana Darkies' were to give plantation episodes.

The *fête* was to be shut each night and opened each day by someone who, at least, was wealthy, and who was to declare the *fête* opened, as though he was wholly ignorant that it had already been opened on a previous day. One of the chapels near had a dozen to twenty foundation and corner-stones, all with names inscribed upon them, some in gilt letters; and surely it was admissible for the church to open her

fête three times over. A temple of the Arts and Sciences was to contain a picture-gallery and scientific novelties, such as phonographs and microscopes, and the youth of Netherleigh were to have such music, and see such sights, as they had ne'er seen before.

It was the second day of the *fête;* the first had passed off with great *éclat.* The opening by a county magnate was a success, for he had drawn with him some of the best people round Netherleigh; but the stalls had not benefited much. On this second day one of the richest men from Greyborough was to open it—a man who had climbed up even into the Mayoral Chair from the position of a poor shop assistant in one of the most squalid parts of the city, now a chairman of many companies, and free with his wealth and his aspirates, aiming at something beyond local place. From him and his party the stall-holders expected much, and when he arrived and was escorted to the daïs they clustered round, prepared to applaud and to hide all merriment.

The great man was short, with thick lips, small grey eyes, low forehead, and long scanty grey beard; dressed most carefully, yet looking as though he wore his Sunday clothes and was hardly at home in them yet. He bowed graciously to all near him; his Mayoralty had taught him much, and he had secured a clergyman of the Established Church to reside in his house for a couple of years to give him the requisite tone, to teach him many points of good breeding.

In his speech he referred to the good the Church did in their midst—he had been a Dissenter until he

became a Mayor—and then dwelt on the kindness of the ladies who had so worked to bring about this beautiful scene; he spoke slowly, word by word, rarely quickening his speech, but at length he warmed to his subject.

'We all are hindebted. Hi ham hindebted to those who—asked me to visit this lovely spot in which I ham hinterested. Nature has done so much, and I see you have brought—art here to—illustrate Nature.' When he paused before a vowel he was successful with non-aspirates. 'I am,' he continued, 'a great lover of—art. Pictures are a great source of comfort and pleasure. True—art comes not from the 'ead but the 'eart. Here we are surrounded by beautiful things, may I say fair ladies.' He was a bachelor; many a maiden of mature years hoped he meant she was fair. 'Beautiful music and true hart; from my own 'eart then I wish all success to this *fête*, and thank you for giving this opportunity to declare it—hopen.'

His last words were drowned in applause, and, must it be said, laughter; for when he got so mixed up between his heart and their art, Fraulein Jordan, who was standing on the outside edge of the crowd, had exploded into a ringing laugh; it was contagious, and, smother it as she would with a clapping of hands, it spread through the crowd. But Mr Henry Habgood took all for applause, and descended, bowing his thanks, to pass round the stalls and make his purchases. He had been most careful over that last word open, had paused thoughtfully, but alas unwittingly had aspirated the vowel emphatically.

All was bustle and chat; groups clustered round

the stalls and followed the man of much wealth, aye and many acres in the parish, round the *fête*. In the art section he lingered long, and under Geoffrey Lowther's guidance looked at the collection of pictures gathered together, and purchased two pictures with notable names in their corners.

He possessed quite a good collection of pictures with good names, and he took care to point out his Tadema that cost him so many hundreds, or his Hook at five hundred pounds, or his Leighton at seven; and then he would allude slightingly to the work of some local artist he had 'patronised' as, 'Yes, I think a coming man, glad to 'elp 'im,' inwardly hoping he had got a bargain from a future R.A.

At one corner of the room was standing a little group that caught the eye of the great man and he hurried across to it. In their midst was a fair-haired lady of a Madonna type, calm and placid, and to her he advanced, extending his hand; his grey eyes lit up, and his face was full of animation as he said, 'Ah, Miss Maitland, I might expect to meet you amidst the pictures. I know your love of—art,' and he retained her hand for a moment as, in a rich, sympathetic tone of voice she said,—

'And there are really some excellent pictures here.'

'Yes,' said the great man, 'they have a Millais, and a Haag, and—'

'Oh, but I meant of our own local work. See, there is a charming picture of Low Point. I think that sunset very beautiful.'

'Who is the lucky—artist to be praised by you, Miss Maitland?'

'Say the lucky artist to be able to paint such a

picture. You should buy it, Mr Habgood; it is only five guineas.' She drew near the picture, and Mr Habgood with her, and so they were a few paces distant from the attendant group.

'You like the picture—will you accept it?' he asked.

'No, no!' she exclaimed.

'But I have to make some purchases, it is nothing;' no further refusal coming from her lips, he turned round, saying, 'Mr Lowther.' And when Geoffrey drew near he said, 'Kindly put a star on that picture of Low Point for me. Who is the artist?'

Geoffrey turned away as though not hearing this last question, and had a star affixed to his own picture that had been praised by Evelyn Maitland and therefore bought by the wealthy Henry Habgood. He knew her love of art—of all that makes life beautiful—and in the gallery where so much of his life was spent in praising the works of artists of all grades, for he had to sell these pictures for his *employés*, he had had many an interesting talk with her upon art and artists, authors and literature. He knew not why, but it pained him terribly to see her in intimate talk with a man to whom the ruling law in life was self-adulation; yet self-upraising, no matter who was injured in his upward climb. And it gave him a fierce wrench when he saw the red star, the lodestar of the artist, gleaming upon his sketch of Low Point by order of Henry Habgood.

This *fête* at Netherleigh brought many in contact with each other whose lives before had not been linked together. It seemed but a momentary contact, but far-reaching were its influences.

Geoffrey Lowther was standing, late in the day,

almost alone amidst his pictures when the local correspondent of a Greyborough paper came in. He was a clerk to a general stores and wine and spirit business in Netherleigh, and knowing shorthand, filled up his time by supplying what news was likely to be published to this Greyborough journal; but he knew from the Greyborough reporters that many of the articles upon art and kindred subjects came from the pen of Geoffrey Lowther, and he feared that this *fête* might be described by him; if so, he knew there was no chance for Charlie Mudd's chatter.

'Charlie's Chatter' was his own descriptive title of his work when he got it printed; he was proud of it; felt quite equal to cut out any of your James Payns or Andrew Langs, only give him the chance; but he did not want this Lowther writing about this *fête*, so 'go for him straight,' he said to himself, and here he was.

'How do, Mr Lowther? Got a pretty show here. Just havin' a look round. Couldn't get away before; beastly busy at our place, but I got the speeches this morning. Look here, Mr Lowther, you ain't going to write about this to-night, are you? Because if you are I sha'n't get a look in.'

'Well, I had promised to send up a sketch.'

'What, of the whole thing?'

'Not of the speeches. I don't write shorthand, unfortunately.'

'Oh, I got old Habgood's speech. What a fake with his aiches, my Hi! But look here, if you are going to do it, it's no good my writing.'

'Send the speeches. They will put in Mr Habgood's, he's rich; I sha'n't interfere with that.'

'Oh, well, I needn't get you to tell me about the pictures then if you are going to write; ta-ta. I'm going to see the acting show. Don't see, though,' he muttered as he turned on his heel, 'why you should do my work. I could have written about the pictures too if he'd told me about 'em.'

Charlie Mudd was Geoffrey's last visitor; he was alone in the dark with his pictures, and the day seemed to pass before him. A chat at Mrs Hawthorne's stall in early morning, then his work here, and the visit of Miss Maitland, and their talk broken in upon by the pompous great little man; and then that little scene that burnt into his brain; her quiet words with the rich man, and the ordering of the star to be affixed to that sketch of Low Point. He felt annoyed. Why could he not work at art without this other wearying, irksome labour? But how live and keep those dependent on him? He walked up and down before the pictures. How could he break the bonds that bound him to this daily labour, that ate up his time, his life, his energy, that gnawed at his heart, giving a dull, aching pain that seemed ever present. 'Five guineas for that little sketch, and I could paint it in a day! Yes, but why was it bought? What chance would I have in London if ever I get a picture hung there? And how could I live? I!' he muttered. 'How could *they* live if I threw up this? No, it must not be; but I'll work, work. Did not Mr Hawthorne praise my work; and he's honest.'

The thought of Mr Hawthorne made him determine to go to their stall; it was evening and he might be there or near, and John Hawthorne was the

one man who did not treat Geoffrey Lowther as though he were of inferior clay to the rich dealers of Greyborough.

He called to his helper, who was standing at the door, to cover up the central screens and close the doors; and he went away into the great tent, where Mrs Hawthorne and Miss Maitland presided over their stalls.

All was crowd and light, and chatter and laughter, a contrast to the solitariness of the scene just left. It was his own life, ever living in a grey half light alone, for to none dare he tell his ambitions and hopes.

He worked his way through the chattering crowd of many sellers and few buyers. There, in front of Mrs Hawthorne's stall, stood Mr Hawthorne and Miss Maitland, and talking with her was Hilda Jordan; and within the stall stood Mrs Hawthorne with the Rev. Nicholas Dawne.

'Ha, Mr Lowther, and how have you done to-day? Sold all your pictures? Sold that Low Point, I see. The man was a good judge that bought that; it was good,' and he laid his hand on Geoffrey's shoulder in a kindly, genial way.

'Say rather the lady did a kind action to a poor man, Mr Hawthorne,' and he looked up at Miss Maitland as he spoke.

'Not a bit of it; don't you depreciate your own work. Miss Maitland, we shall be proud of Geoffrey Lowther in Greyborough some day.'

Mr Lowther must not wait for that. Greyborough waits until its artists are dead before it is proud of them.'

'Then he must get stamped London and then they will find him out.'

'Or kick him out for sheer jealousy.'

'Ah, Miss Maitland,' said Hilda, 'you love beauty in the world, but all cannot see beauty.'

'I would make the world love beauty in life and worship gold less. Bah! it makes one sick this gold worship,' and she turned away towards her own stall.

'I have never seen Miss Maitland so excited. What has so moved her?' said Mr Hawthorne.

But Geoffrey Lowther did not answer. His position often tied his tongue; he could not say that it was the fawning of the public upon the wealth of Henry Habgood, added to the marked attention of that local Crœsus for herself, that had so roused Miss Maitland. He noticed how the slight remark of Hilda Jordan had seemed to send the fire into the eyes of Miss Maitland, and forced her to speak; and this outburst was the more remarkable as her usual manner was cold, reserved, a calm, statuesque *façon* that allowed no emotions to bubble to the surface.

But his thoughts were broken in upon by the interruption of a tall, handsome-looking man, who shook hands with Mr Hawthorne with the words, 'Quite a success, and I believe we owe a great deal to Mrs Hawthorne.'

'And how is the dramatic tent going?'

'Crowded! Ah, a really great audience; we must get a placard—House full.'

'But are you not on to-night?'

'Only look after them to-night. To-morrow's the big night; we play "New Men and Old Acres." You must come and see us.'

'We will. Let me introduce you, but you know Mr Lowther here, he is managing our Art Gallery.'

Mr Donald Bain knew Mr Lowther very well indeed, and Mr Lowther was hardly on a level with Mr Hawthorne, merchant, or Mr Donald Bain, merchant's agent, and therefore he had taken no notice of him, but at this bidding he put out his hand, saying, 'Glad you are helping us; very good of you,' and then turned to be introduced to Mrs Hawthorne and Hilda, who, when he spoke to her, looked up into his face, saying,—

'You act a great deal, Mr Donald Bain?'

Mr Donald Bain was taken aback by this very simple question from this frank, outspoken young girl whom he had never before seen, and yet it was only a question about his acting, about which he had no small pride.

'Ah!—well—not very often. Greyborough won't stand—too much acting, will it, Mr Hawthorne?'

'Posing it sometimes prefers to acting,' interjected Mrs Hawthorne. 'Don't you think so, Mr Bain?'

Donald, as all his chums called him, felt uncomfortable; this seemed to be following up that young girl's question, but she was pretty. But a beauty more worthy his attention at this moment joined Mrs Hawthorne. He raised his hat, saying, with the most aristocratic slight drawl he always assumed, 'Ah, Miss Maitland, you must really, ah, give up your hard work now. Cannot I induce you to come into our tent?'

'But you are not acting, Mr Bain,' interjected Hilda.

'I dare not ask Miss Maitland to come in if I was,'

retorted Donald, and there was a ring of reality in the tone both of his entreaty and this retort that for a second seemed to transform him into another man. It was but for the second. With a bow full of stage pose he added: 'It will, I assure you, do them all good, make them play doubly well, if they know you are in the audience, Miss Maitland.'

But Miss Maitland replied quite coldly, 'I fear I cannot; we drive back, and I am already expecting the carriage.'

'Then to-morrow you will come?'

'But you play to-morrow,' said Hilda.

'And you, too, will come and see me,' ejaculated Donald, all his assumed nonchalance gone.

'If Mrs Hawthorne can spare me I shall like to come,' said Hilda.

'Then I will join you,' said Miss Maitland, as she held forth her hand to Mr Hawthorne.

Donald Bain turned to his enemy, Hilda Jordan, for a strange sense of being discovered seemed to possess him; but she was laughing right merrily at some word Geoffrey Lowther had spoken. Was it at his expense? He felt a rush of passion against this picture shopman. Had he dared to put him in a ridiculous light before this young girl?

Mrs Hawthorne suddenly turned the situation by saying hurriedly, 'Come, Fraulein, we must be going; will you help me with all these parcels?' And Donald Bain went his way, and Miss Maitland hers, very quickly, to her carriage that awaited her for the long drive to Greyborough, and Mr and Mrs Hawthorne with several parcels, and Fraulein Jordan with half-a-dozen more, issued from the great tent

out into the clear, still night for their short walk home.

How vast and silent seemed the great vault of heaven to Hilda Jordan as she trotted on behind her friends, looking upward to the dark purple dome, vast, illimitable, filled with rounded points of light that glittered against the deep hue of space in the clear soft night.

How glorious, how mighty, and yet how beautifully tender seemed the beauty around her; how sharply contrasting to the tinselly glare of the tent, with all its gimcracks and chatter, and all the little strivings and jealousies she had watched through the day. Oh, it was lovely, this soft night! What a sadness to go in! But she remembered her own room looked out over the sea, and she would open the window quietly and drink in all this calming loveliness. But as though others had observed her thoughts, she suddenly heard Mrs Hawthorne say as she halted before her,—

'It is a lovely night, we thought we would take the field way, but are those packets too heavy, Fraulein?'

'Oh, no!' exclaimed Hilda, 'the night is so beautiful. Ist die Nacht das halbe Leben. Und die schönste Hälfte zwar.'*

'What's that, Fraulein?' cried John Hawthorne. 'Night the best half of life. Why, you sleep through the most of it.'

'Ach! but such a night,' and she threw her head backwards, looking skywards, for her hands were full; and the jerk sent some of the packages on to the path

* Oh, the night is half of Life. And in truth the sweetest half.

they were turning into. But a figure darted before her as she bent forward to stop them, and a voice exclaimed,—

'Surely we ought not to have allowed you to be so burdened.' It was the Rev. Nicholas Dawne who had overtaken them, and from his quick breathing he seemed to have hurried in the attempt.

'Burdened!' exclaimed Hilda. 'Why, they don't weigh a pound.'

'You cannot always weigh burdens,' retorted the young minister.

'The night is so beautiful we were going to take the field path home,' said Mrs Hawthorne.

'Then let me take some of your parcels.'

'Oh, no, I have but these. Why, I can carry them with one hand, but Fraulein really is laden.'

'You see,' said Mr Dawne, 'Mrs Hawthorne says I must help you,' and he took three of the light packages from her hand.

'Oh, but the night was so glorious I thought not of those packets until they fell; then you came.'

'To help you in this little trouble. Do you like our English country?'

'Like! I love it. Ach! There is the sea, oh, look! Even the stars are reflected in it, it is so still; ah, the sea is wonderful!'

'Did you live near the sea in Germany?'

'Near the sea! Gott in Himmel! No. Away, far away, in a great sandy plain. Oh, your green hills and little woods are so lovely, but we had great sunsets across our wide plains, and I loved the dark forests. Do you love to watch the sunsets, Mr Dawne?'

'Yes, oh, yes.'

'Then you don't, or you would not speak like that.'

'But—but I live here always,' stammered Mr Dawne.

'And have not yet grown to love that glorious sea. What do you love?'

'Fraulein means what do you like,' said Mr Hawthorne, who was just ahead of them. 'Her English is not perfect yet.'

'No, we have no "to like" in German. We love everything.'

'And everybody?' murmured the Rev. Nicholas Dawne.

'Ah, no, no—I am not German. I am English. And don't you know how long we have to live?'

'No, do you?' stammered the young curate.

'Why, two and a half minutes. One to laugh, one to sigh, and half a minute to love, for one dies in the middle of this last minute.'

'Some die before they reach it,' fell slowly from the lips of her package-bearing companion.

'Oh, yes. But you—you do not want to reach it. You learned men have no time for *ennui*. Does not Jean Paul say that?'

'Who was Jean Paul?' asked Mr Dawne.

A ringing laugh burst out over the fields—a hearty, fresh, joyous laugh, innocent of malice, full of amusement.

'You are living the laughter moment,' said Mr Dawne, with a tinge of the sighing moment in his tone; but as he spoke they heard a hum of voices not far off, for they had turned up from the sea path and were nearing the road, and a voice came over

the hedge to them--a voice full of rich, compressed sanctity.

'Ah, Mr Hawthorne, your young companions betray your presence.'

'Yes, we thought we should meet you,' said a weak, effeminate voice.

It was the Rev. Josiah Cubberley and the wealthy Mr Busteed.

'Why, Mr Cubberley!' exclaimed Mr Hawthorne, as they passed through the gate on to the road, 'what has made you take this walk?'

'Oh, my young friend here thought the night so fine.'

'No, it was you thought so,' quickly exclaimed Mr Busteed.

'Well, I think we both thought so; but let me take those packages, Fraulein Jordan,' and Mr Cubberley bent in a fatherly fashion over the young girl. But she turned aside, saying, 'Oh, Mr Dawne has the most,' and walked on quickly with Mrs Hawthorne to their gate, that was near.

But there they must perforce turn and take the packages from Mr Dawne; and Mr Cubberley had taken one, that he handed to Fraulein Jordan, and as he held it, he said,—

'Had we known you had taken the field path we would have helped you earlier. Good-night, Miss Jordan, you must come in and see me.'

'Oh, but the children won't love to—I mean like to.'

'Nay, nay, use the word love; it is good that young people should love, and not only like, those set over them. Good-night, Miss Jordan. I shall

hope to see you,' and he took her warm ungloved hand and held it. Fraulein tried to withdraw it, but he held it as he said, 'I shall expect you to call upon Mrs Cubberley.'

Mr Dawne had got rid of his packages, and now stepped forward to say good-night, but Mr Busteed was before him with his hand, and the words, 'Such a shame, you know, that you took the field path, but good-night now. Are you coming, Mr Dawne?'

Mr Dawne held out his hand, but a thrill shot through him as it was grasped with a firm shake and with the words, 'I thank you so much; forgive my amusement that you, from Oxford, did not know Jean Paul; it was so funny. But you are cold, you shiver, you must walk home quickly, good-night;' and she was gone.

CHAPTER V

'THE NINE'S' CLUB

It was to be a great night at 'The Nine' clubhouse in Greyborough.

Not that this was a clubhouse at all; it was only a room, and the members were their own waiters and hall porters. Each member had a key of a peculiar type. This key had no handle, but in the place of the handle was another key. If an admitted member of the club, with one end you were your own hall porter and opened the door; with the other end you were your own butler and took out your own drinks; and, of course, you were your own waiter, and also your own cashier, for the method of paying for whatever you appropriated was by leaving the cash in the cupboard from whence you had taken your drinks. The whole arrangement was a masterpiece of a wage-saving genius. No servants, no waiters, everyone his own attendant, and no expense. *Nil* could be written under this head of outlay.

But on great nights waiters appeared and the room was decorated, and the usual forlorn look of tables with dirty glasses, and this cupboard with little piles of money, of sums exactly tallying with the state of the bottles within the cupboard, was wholly changed.

A great actor was to be *fêted* by the members of 'The Nine.'

The club was called 'The Nine' because it was generally surmised by the originators that the Muses were Nine, and were goddesses of all the arts, but the devotees of Clio and of Urania and several other of the Muses did not, as the members put it, 'cotton' to the club. In fact, the worshippers of Thalia and Melpomene made up the greatest number of the members, with, of course, the devotees of Terpsichore joining them. But Thalia and Terpsichore would perchance have disowned their so-called adherents, for the comedy the Thalians worshipped was elongated farce; and the dances beloved by the Terpsichoreans knew but little of graceful motion, or even of beauty of form; they rather worshipped the high kick, and the well-covered figure, with suggestive motion of dress.

But on a great night, such as was taking place on this December night, some months after the summer *fête* held at Netherleigh, all these penchants were set aside. Outsiders were invited, a well-known citizen took the chair, and until the great man was gone the 'Nines' were not more than occasionally noisy. The chairman gave quite a Savage Club tone to the proceedings by addressing his audience as 'Brother Nines,' although very many who were there were not 'Nines.' Donald Bain was in great form; he was hon. secretary and treasurer of the club, and he moved about with that air *distingué* he assumed for his aristocratic parts when on the boards with the 'Thespians.'

'Good old Donald!' greeted him as he passed by.

'Going to give us "*The* Song" to-night, old man?' called out others.

Donald waved his hand with a lofty yet condescending air, and went up to the top table, near which sat Mr Mudd, who would send a report of the proceedings to the *Greyborough Gazette.* Charlie had shifted his diggings, as he said, from that infernally dull hole Netherleigh, had cut the wine and spirit game, and was now wholly employed as reporter on the *Greyborough Gazette*, and Charlie meant to make a bit out of to-night in the way of lineage if the big man let drop anything special, as he said to Donald.

'Well, oil his tongue; give him some special Scotch, dear boy,' said Donald. For now that Charlie was reporter in Greyborough, Donald Bain, Esq., was always chummy with him; and, as secretary and treasurer of the club, dispensed the club hospitality, so that Charlie knew where to get a drink if he met Donald near the club.

The musical world of Greyborough was well to the fore on this night. Art was represented by the scene-painter of the theatre and one or two artists. Literature could hardly be said to be represented at all, unless Geoffrey Lowther's local articles on Art were literature. He was sitting some way down the room next to a stranger to Greyborough, who had begun to question him upon life in that western city in a very pointed manner.

'Who is that curious little man with the long sandy grey beard sitting fourth from your chairman?' asked the stranger.

'Oh, that is Mr Habgood, one of our merchant princes,' said Geoffrey, 'a patron of all the arts.'

'He doesn't look very artistic himself,' said the stranger. 'But I did not think Art was patronised, as you call it, here.'

'Patronised, but not understood or cherished,' said Lowther. 'No one loves Art for Art's sake. But we have had some good men here too. Not recognised here, even when they have made a name outside, save perhaps by a struggle to get their pictures cheaply for speculation.'

'Well, you have had some good men, and your very district must breed artists and poets. Who could live amid such beauty and not long to depict it for others' eyes or ears?'

Geoffrey Lowther's heart leaped at the words. Who was this? Who could speak like this of their neglected artists and poets, and beauty of scenery? His heart went out to the man; and they were soon in earnest talk, heedless of the chatter and laughter and noisy jokes around them, and the stranger proved to have an intimate knowledge of all their men who, by their work for a century past, had illumined the history of Greyborough for those living away from its influences.

How Geoffrey revelled in this talk! A type of conversation he never got, for in his business life all was subservient to the money question, and outside that he knew no one, save Mr Hawthorne, with whom he could talk; and in the winter months he saw but little of him.

'You know well the work even of our modern men,' he said at length.

'I ought to,' said the stranger, with a smile. 'I always read all your local articles on Art.'

The blood rushed to Geoffrey's face.

'Read local articles,' he stammered.

'Yes, and some of them are remarkably good. You see,' he added in a low tone, 'I have to write on your Art every year, and, living in London, it is the only way not to miss anything important.'

His articles 'were good, remarkably good,' echoed in Geoffrey's brain. This from a man who had so interested him; should he tell him who he was? That they were his articles. His wavering was stayed by the stranger's next words.

'By the way, you seem to know a good deal about local Art matters. Who writes those articles in the *Gazette?* Do you know?'

'I ought to,' said Geoffrey, quietly, and the hot flush of colour in his face told the rest.

'They're not yours! I ought to have guessed it by your enthusiasm, but I thought you had been stirred up by the articles. My lucky star played me well to-night. Let me congratulate you, but—but I don't know your name.'

'Lowther,' said Geoffrey. 'Geoffrey Lowther.'

'Why don't you sign? Always sign.'

'Oh, I should be ashamed to; and they might not let me.'

'Let you! Don't let them have the articles without it. What do they pay you? Oh, don't be shocked! I have a business side to my character. What do they pay you, now?'

'Nothing,' said Geoffrey.

'I thought as much. Send your work to where they will pay. You have read deeply on Art, and love Nature. Do you paint yourself?'

'A little,' said Geoffrey.

'Ha! that's a pity if you are going to write. Drop one or the other, except for your own amusement.'

'But I love both.'

'So you may, so you may, but you write well; let me give you my card. I am really glad to have met you. Send your next general article to *Art and Literature* and mention my name; not too long—the poor public's brains are so terribly softened, they can't stand much good work at a time. Brain softening produced by snippets, is the diagnosis for the educated masses!'

Geoffrey felt a thrill of intense pleasure as this man so talked to him. He looked at the card: Herbert Barker, Editor of *The Year and Its Art.* How often he had dreamt of his work being noticed in London; but it was his painting he had hoped might some day be hung there, and here was a London critic praising his writing. Ay, and helping him—helping him to London work. He could have sent forth a 'hurrah,' so excited was his mind.

But just then the room hushed down; it had been joining in choruses of music-hall songs of the inane order, and so had given Geoffrey and his new friend a chance for their chat, but a chord of sweet harmony swept through the room as four glee singers started a quartette, 'Lull me to sleep, ye winds.'

How the soft harmonies seem to lull the excitement in his brain, to enhance his joy; and yet to chasten and beatify his pleasure; for it was real joy, this praise by a stranger of his work, and as the words melted in gentle cadence, 'for I am weary and am

overwrought; with too much toil, and too much care distraught,' how applicable were they to his own toiling, working, worrying life, lightened by his love for Art and Beauty—beauty in all things, in the concord of sweet sounds now filling his ears, and hushing even this noisy crowd to peace for a moment.

As the quartette ended, 'Ah, that's good!' ejaculated his new friend, and a mild applause broke out, but it was terribly weak, 'too good for the audience.' Well, Mr Lowther, I must soon go; I have to get back to town to-night. When you are in town look me up at the "Dogberry" Club.'

'Dogberry,' echoed Geoffrey.

'Oh, yes, we are all Dogberries some time in our life. There are a good many of 'em in this room think themselves mighty important, but I have had the pleasure of that quartette and meeting you, Mr Lowther,' and he extended his hand. 'Don't forget to write to the Mag., and remember the "Dogberry." We are all good men and true,' and he was gone.

Geoffrey sat on for some time oblivious to all around him. 'When you are in town look me up.' Ah, he did not know how he was tied, but what a vista his words opened up of congenial work, and to be paid well for it. A rush of thoughts came—throw up his present position, risk all on the promise opened out to him; but he was pulled back at once by the vision of those dependent on him. He might risk, they could not; neither could he risk their lives. No,' he said, as he became cognisant again of where he was, 'I must work on; the two tasks must go hand in hand until their livelihood is secured. My dead father tells me that.'

He looked round the room ; a vacant chair or two showed some had left the room, and the others were getting noisy. There were great cries of 'The Song, Donald, the Song!'

Donald only sang one song, a Scotch song of a see-saw, drony, bagpiping order. He had no voice, but he had a Scotch accent, and the allusion in the song to floods of whisky always aroused a yell of delight, for this song was a certainty at a late hour on all such festive gatherings in Greyborough. The big man was leaving, and so it was called for a little earlier than usual ; and a proud man was Donald as he stood up, amidst uproarious cries of 'Good old Donald!' to sing this song before one of the greatest of living actors.

The whisky joke was given with a non-musical shout that evoked an applause that drowned even Donald's voice ; several glasses were broken in the hammering on the table, and as the song concluded the great actor rose and, amidst the din, shook hands with all near him, shook hands with everybody, held Donald's hand in his and said, 'A wonderful song, sir, a wonderful song, and sung equally wonderfully ;' and he shook Donald's hand effusively. As he passed out of the room, past where Geoffrey was still sitting, Geoffrey saw a peculiar smile ruffling his features that was not an acting smile, and Geoffrey started up from the table, saying to himself, 'And Donald Bain thinks he has praised him!'

When he got out into the open air the night was clear and crisp, the stars prinked the deep purple dome of night with bright specks. Orion glittered in the Southern sky ; the words of the quartette, 'Lull me to sleep, ye winds,' came into his mind, and

the sweet harmonies filled his ears, blotting out the raucous row of the last chorus.

Some hours later Donald Bain and half-a-dozen other revellers emerged from what they called their clubhouse. They were not long alone, and as they reeled along with their companions of the other sex, who awaited them, they saw not the glory of the night or the purity of the stars.

CHAPTER VI

A WINTER WALK

THE next day, as Geoffrey Lowther walked in the early morning from the house in the eastern suburb to the business that lay on the western side of the city, how the thoughts born of the incidents of the previous night surged and raced within his brain.

To whom could he speak of them? Not his mother; she had but one dread, lest aught should happen to him in his situation and their livelihood should be gone. Not to his employers; they were business men, and although they knew he wrote on Art, thus far his work helped their business; but anything that seriously occupied his mind would interfere with it. He yearned to talk to someone. Then he suddenly remembered it was Saturday. The sky looked promising. Yes, if it held fine, in spite of its being winter he would walk down early to Netherleigh and try and have a talk with Mr Hawthorne, the one friend above him in the Netherleigh social scale he dared tell of his work and his hopes.

When he arrived at the shop he went through the usual routine, setting the place in order, dusting and seeing the one junior did his work; going into the large room at the back, where pictures were exhibited, and seeing all was clean and in order.

This work over, he turned out the day-book and ledger and commenced the almost automatic work of posting accounts. But this was work that allowed him to think, and his thoughts ran away with him and built many a *Château en Espagne;* then he would pull himself together as he turned up the folios and made the entries of so many half pans, or so many tubes of colour, of canvases and boards, portfolios and crayons, to the various artists or teachers; and here and there the entry of an engraving, and still more rarely the entry of a picture.

At last an entry made him pause; it was the sale of a little foreign oil-colour to Mr Henry Habgood.

Why did he buy that? He knows no foreign names, and he can't expect that to go up in price. It was marvellously clever, but he could not see it. 'Ha, Miss Maitland. I remember now, the governor told me she had liked it. How can she care even to talk with such a man! The very look of him must jar all her artistic sensibilities,' and he laid down his pen on the big ledger, this time his thoughts overmastering the automatic lower action of the brain.

The figure of Miss Maitland was before him: her soft, grey-blue eyes, that were ever nearly veiled, save when an excited glance shot fully from them, her rounded cheeks, and low forehead, half hid in the golden hair, and the low, sympathetic voice, rich in timbre, but so gentle in accent. How could she endure even the presence of a man like Habgood?

Rumour, he knew, had lately played with the fortunes of Miss Maitland; people said her mother's wealth had melted through the failure of an old business in which her money had been locked up.

'Surely,' he exclaimed within himself, 'if she had to work for her daily bread she would not sell her body to that man she must detest.' She seemed standing near him, as she had done so often when he had showed her some famous engravings, or when they had stood before some great picture the firm were exhibiting. Then there flashed through his mind the talk of last night—what it might mean; then suddenly he took up his pen and referred to a name. 'Folio 438,' he uttered aloud, and turned over the pages of the ledger, and wrote away as though his life was at stake.

Ten minutes later his employer entered and passed into the inner office, shortly after emerging with some letters in his hand. 'See to these, Mr Lowther, will you?' he said. 'I am going out to see those things at the Westover sale. I may not be back until the evening,' and laying the letters on the desk he was gone, and Geoffrey was alone again with his thoughts.

That there is a power of mind over mind, even annihilating space, is very certain; the very commonplace experiment of making a person turn round in an assembly, or halt in a street, proves this, but it is yet an unknown power as to its scope. Whether Geoffrey Lowther's thoughts had aught to do with it or not, the fact remains that, ere an hour had elapsed, Miss Maitland was standing before him in the shop. He came down from behind the ledger, and she greeted him in those low tones he had been hearing for an hour. She was come for an outdoor water-colour case of tubes for a young girl friend; and

this matter settled, she asked him if they had any special pictures exhibiting.

A thought flashed through his mind he would tell her of the purchase of the foreign picture, so, as he led the way up to the workroom, he said, 'No special pictures, but a general collection, and some foreign ones well worth seeing.'

Why it was he could not tell, but when he stood in this room, amidst the pictures, he felt at home with all who came there, be they ever so rich. He knew the pictures, he loved good work, and his reading and knowledge of Art placed him on a platform that felt firm under his feet as he talked to all comers.

They passed round the room looking at landscape and seascape, of moorland and mountain and stream, of leaping wavelets and thundering sea climbing up a rock-bound coast. Here and there was a figure piece entitled 'The Reverie,' or 'A Letter,' or some such indefinite title.

Beneath one of the finest landscapes were placed the words:

> 'This earth were good as Heaven
> If all men lived as these should live, who owned
> A House to dwell in so embellished.'

'What does he mean?' asked Miss Maitland.

'That this world is too lovely for aught sordid or evil,' said Geoffrey; 'the words might have been placed under the next picture.'

'Why?' asked Miss Maitland. The picture was the portrait of a beautiful woman.

'Do you ask why, Miss Maitland? Surely beauty

in the human form is as glorious as in land or sea, and should not be debased.'

Miss Maitland gave a curious shrug of the shoulders and passed away from the figure study to the end wall of the room, where were grouped the foreign pictures Geoffrey mentioned.

Here were more figure scenes, pictures telling an incident or a story, human life.

'How is it?' asked Miss Maitland, 'that our English artists paint so few genre pictures? You never paint figures, do you?' And she turned full upon him, and her eyes looked fully out at him demanding an answer.

'I have tried, but it takes intense labour to see into the innermost soul of a person and to place that on canvas. I cannot succeed.'

'Do artists do that?' she asked.

'Great artists do, or else they put their own souls into their pictures and so give them life.'

'Then that would not be a portrait,' she retorted.

'Few like to see their own portraits,' said Geoffrey, and then added abruptly, pointing to a little picture entitled 'Toasting the Bride,' 'Mr Habgood purchased the companion to this. He may take this one.'

A hot flush flashed over her face. 'Why does Greyborough think so much of that man? He is detestable,' and her foot and a quick motion of her hand told him the words had been wrenched from her.

'He is rich,' said Geoffrey. 'Greyborough worships wealth. It does not buy many pictures, but Mr Habgood does buy.'

'Yes, because he thinks they are a good investment.'

'He bought the companion to that,' said Geoffrey, 'because you appreciated it, Miss Maitland,' and he pointed to 'Toasting the Bride.' He watched her face, but she stood looking at another picture and said very quietly,—

'I shall have to resist praising any pictures, I fear.' Then after a pause she added, 'Mr Hawthorne tells me, that was your article on Greek Art in the *Gazette*, Mr Lowther. I so enjoyed it. Why do you not write more? But then, you are always here when I come; you ought to write and paint.'

Should he tell her of the meeting with the London editor? And as the query flashed through his mind the words rushed from his lips—'Only last night a London editor told me not to write again for the *Gazette*.'

'Oh, but you must—you really must not give it up.'

'But to write for the London papers,' added Geoffrey.

'Why not? Do. I am sure you will succeed; and you know I like your painting as well as your word painting. I do hope you will succeed.'

'Your hopes will spur me on, Miss Maitland. There are not many in Greyborough who love Art and Literature as you do.'

'Leave Greyborough, Mr Lowther. You have a future before you; here you will be cramped, belittled. There is no respect for intellectual gifts in the place; leave it.'

'I cannot, Miss Maitland,' was Geoffrey's answer.

'You are content to remain—this!' and she looked round upon him, half in scorn, half in pity, a look that

stung him. Then she added, 'You should; you could create.'

Her words seem to goad him to tell her how he was bound by other's needs; but he crushed back the impetuous thoughts that would have betrayed his yearnings and the duty that bound him, and simply said, 'Perhaps in years to come you may recall these words and know they helped me.'

'Why, if you were only rich Greyborough now would think a lot of your work. Oh, it is horrid to be poor!' and she hurriedly walked out of the room and turned at the door, saying, 'Good-morning, Mr Lowther, thank you so much for showing me the pictures.'

'Ha,' thought Geoffrey, 'if I was rich you would not have left me in this fashion. "Toasting the Bride." Does old Habgood hope soon to gloat over her form? She cannot consent to that;' and he went down into the shop, with the thought of last night's talk filling his mind, with increased determination to see Mr Hawthorne on the morrow.

The next morning he was up betimes. The sky, as the sun slowly broke through the low banks of grey mist in the east, was half veiled in these vaporous clouds; between them the faint grey-blue sky appeared, and Geoffrey was soon away from the town and tramping on between pine trees and silver birches, whose delicate tracery of hanging branches was outlined against the cool sky with a marvellous beauty.

He had a ten-mile walk before him, but he soon got glimpses away over the undulating landscape of the silver grey sea, and far away beyond it rose up,

as dark cloud strata, the mountains on the Welsh coast.

As he leaped a stile and trudged onward over a field hedged with wide-spreading oaks and groups of grand elms, Nature sent a thrill of pleasure through his veins. All sense of the benumbing cares of his pinched life were gone ; he was joyous, happy in the beauty around him, and as the soft boom of some rich old village bells came across the meads to him he was happy, with the rich capability of enjoying beauty with eyes and ears and all his intellect. Onward he tramped through villages, and over sordid riverside towns, where the men hung in groups about the low walls near the closed doors of the inns. Onward through this, then again through fields, until, in climbing a gate, he caught a glimpse ahead of an old pinnacled square church tower grouped between some dark massive yews that had stood the storms of perchance a thousand years, so mighty were they in trunk and in spreading branches. It was too much for Geoffrey ; he halted on the top of the gate, took a small sketch-book from his pocket and got the outline of the scene, jotting down the colours of sky and cloud, dark yews, and ruddy brown tower, and the grey brown of the lower embattlements of the church.

' Never saw it from that point of view before. How suggestive of peace and beauty,' he said, as he looked at the sketch, and closing the book leaped down from his post and started off again through the grey winter grass and 'neath leafless trees, until far ahead, over a flat stretch of land, he saw the square tower of Netherleigh lying beneath a wooded hillside.

He did not want to run against the little crowds that would shortly issue from chapels and church, and as it was yet early he went on straight past the picturesque perpendicular church, and up a secluded lane overhung with high ferny banks and spreading trees, until he reached the hill summit; then striking across some fields he gained a stile, from whence he could look down on the seaside home of the Hawthornes; and away westwards was the wide stretch of tawny sea that in the winter sun gleamed now like pale gold.

Out on a dark point that ran out into the now still waters was a cottage where he knew he could get some lunch; he intended striking down there, getting his frugal meal, having a glorious stroll amidst the rocks and headlands, with the joyous thought within him of coming probabilities, then walking back at the time he knew he would most probably meet the Hawthornes. If he did not meet them he would call; for some reason he felt compelled to talk to Mr Hawthorne.

To-day that intense sense of loneliness, of being isolated from his fellows, from those who loved the things he loved, that ever seized upon him on his town Sundays was absent; he had Nature for his friend, and a look forward to a talk with one man whose soul could grasp the pleasures of knowledge that might not 'pay' and that gave no opportunity for display.

He sat up on this hillside on this narrow stile, lost in pleasant dreamland, his eyes revelling in the beauty, his mind ranging over what his life might be, when he was startled by a voice behind him, saying, 'Pardon, sir.'

He turned round, and there was Fraulein Jordan with Midge.

'Why, Mr Lowther! Oh, the summer's come again to see you here. Mr Hawthorne will be glad to see you. How are you?' and out came her plump ungloved hand, her face full of insouciant smiles, that spoke honestly her pleasure at seeing him. 'You are coming to dinner with us. Come, Midge, scramble over.'

But Geoffrey put out his arms and lifted the child up, and as he did so the little face was stretched out to his for a kiss.

'Why, Midge! Midge! She has just told Mr Busteed she "Didn't like gemmen."'

'So Mr Busteed is still here?'

'Here! He is afraid to move. He expects someone to marry him forcibly for his money some day. He told me so. Oh, he is a funny "gemmen," isn't he, Midge?' And before Geoffrey could assist her she had deftly climbed the stile and sat down on its step. 'But you will come to dinner; we miss the swallows, the summer birds, down here.'

'I was going to call about three,' said Geoffrey. 'Will Mr Hawthorne be at home?'

'Three! Why not come now? Who are you going to see?'

Geoffrey had his reasons for not accepting this improvised invitation, although he felt sure the Hawthornes would cordially welcome him; but he would miss the beauty of this winter day, and he knew also some of his 'friends' would say he walked to Netherleigh for a 'good feed,' so he said, 'Mr Hawthorne does not expect me.'

'That doesn't matter, he likes you.'

'But I came for a good walk, and you must let me have it and then call,' said Geoffrey.

'They will be cross with me. I shall tell Mr Hawthorne you would not come. We had Mr Habgood down here this week. They say round here he is going to marry Miss Maitland, your friend, Mr Lowther. Is that true?'

Strive as he would, Geoffrey could not control features or voice at this direct onslaught. He looked away over the sea and said quietly, 'I do not know Mr Habgood.'

'But you do Miss Maitland?'

'Only in business matters.'

'But she told me how often she had pleasant chats with you in the *salon*.'

In desperation Geoffrey turned round; her blue eyes were looking out fully at him, watching him.

'I do see Miss Maitland in our *salon*—a good name for it, and I do not think she is likely to marry Mr Habgood.'

'If she does, it's for his money, she detests him; she told me so. If she does marry him—faugh!' and she made a splutter with her lips as though she would spit on the ground, and then suddenly starting up said, 'Why, here is Mr Dawne. How early they are out of church!'

Geoffrey saw the clerical figure climbing the hillside, and not wishing to meet a crowd of Netherleigh people, he hurriedly said 'Good-bye,' adding he would call about three, and started obliquely down the hillside toward the sea. When nearly at the

ottom he looked round and saw the black coat ilhouetted against the light dress of the young overness, the little child running and dancing head of them.

Geoffrey drove the unpleasant thoughts suggested y Hilda Jordan's words out of his mind. Beautiful Nature always enabled him to set aside unpleasant memories. He got his meal at the cottage, chatted with the fisherman and his wife, and then had a stroll along the cliff for a couple of hours; that put his mind well in tune for his talk with Mr Hawthorne, and then he made his way back over fallow field and betwixt gorse and dried bracken to make his call.

CHAPTER VII

A FATEFUL DECISION

He was kept waiting in the hall by the maid, and as he stood near the door of the drawing-room that opened out on to the balcony, he heard a scuffling and noise. Children romping, he thought; but at the next moment the door suddenly opened and out burst Fraulein Jordan, and behind her, without his hat, the Rev. Josiah Cubberley. Hilda looked flushed and decidedly cross, but suddenly seeing Geoffrey, her usual frank smile with the deep dimples returned, and she said, 'Ach, you are come! Oh, give Mr Cubberley his hat, there it is on the chair. I will tell Mr Hawthorne you are here,' and with a bound she was up a few steps that led into Mr Hawthorne's study.

Geoffrey stepped into the drawing-room, took up the reverend gentleman's broad soft hat and handed it to him.

'Oh, thank you, thank you,' he said. 'Why, it is the young man who paints on Sunday. Not to-day, I trust. Not to-day. Thank you, thank you,' and he took his hat and was gone.

'Do come up, Mr Lowther,' came the voice of Hilda from above. 'Mr Hawthorne is in the garden, he will be here in a moment.'

In amidst the books was Hilda when he entered the room. 'What was it that flushed her cheeks with so abnormal a red?' thought Geoffrey.

'Is he gone?' she asked; and then muttered in an undertone, '*Der hässliche.*'

The thought flashed through Geoffrey's mind—Had our Rev. Josiah aught to do with the flushed state of the young girl? That scuffle he had heard, the leaving the hat—but he had no time to follow the thought, for in through a glass door, from the steep hill garden, came Mr Hawthorne.

'Why, Mr Lowther, glad to see you. Why did you not come and have a bit of midday dinner with us? Fraulein told us. Why, Fraulein, have you been romping with the boys? Your face is peony hue. Go and get cooled down. Sit down, Mr Lowther. This is like a bright October day. Well, and how is the art work going on?'

'That is exactly what I wanted to have a word with you, sir, about. Will you forgive my troubling you on a Sunday?'

'But, Mr Lowther, I am glad to see you, I say; heartily glad. Oh, we don't get too much intellectual society down here. But what is it. And as to Sunday, well, your talk won't hurt me, whatever Mr Cubberley may say.'

'He was with Fraulein as I came in.'

'That girl is like a ripe peach to the wasps with the clericals. Establishment or Dissent they all hover round her, and they all seem to come out of their masks. There is that ascetic young Dawne—the pale-faced "priest" as he loves to be called—positively ripples with mirth with her; but come, to

what do we owe this pleasure?' And he got up and shut the door, drew two chairs to the fire and said, 'Come, now, we shall be alone and can talk comfortably.'

Then Geoffrey told him of the advice given him, of his anxiety to follow it but his fear of offending his employers and running any risk.

'But I don't think you will run any risk,' said Mr Hawthorne. 'Nay more, your people will be the more pleased to keep you if you make a name upon Art; their business is Art, and they will benefit by your reputation. I'm an employer, and the trouble is to get anyone to take more than a superficial interest in matters. Put it plainly, and, what is more, ask time to go to town.'

'Do you think I dare, Mr Hawthorne? You know it is not my own livelihood at stake.'

'No, no, I know your anxieties, Mr Lowther. But let me say it bluntly—you have, I feel sure, a career before you; I verily believe more as a writer than painter. Everyone, even here, likes your work until they hear it's yours. Fraulein there always delights in it, and she is so well read in three tongues I call her a judge of literature.'

Geoffrey's face betrayed his pleasure at these words, but he replied, 'It must be years before I can hope to earn much by writing or painting. I know how precarious such money is, and I will not risk the lives of others.'

'You need not, I am sure.'

'But what will my employers say?'

'Do you mind my speaking to them?'

'Oh, sir! I should indeed be grateful.'

'And you leave it to me to say what I like?'

'You know my life. There is no other position in Greyborough so good as the one I hold. I dare not risk to lose it, for I cannot leave here.'

'I know all about it, Mr Lowther. You certainly shall not lose it by my words. I know your senior partner and can talk freely with him; and let me say it, he is too good a judge of an honest workman to lose your help. But come, you have had a long walk down, you are tired; let me give you a glass of wine and a biscuit. We have an early tea on Sundays.'

But Geoffrey refused his kind offer and went to the window to look out into the garden, really to hide the emotion caused by his friend's kindly words. They had touched him to the quick.

'You had a grand walk down. Are you too tired for a turn on the cliff? You go back by train?'

'No, walk,' said Geoffrey.

'Come then, sit down, sit down, you must rest. Ha! who's this?' A sharp ring and a resounding cracker-like knock told of a visitor. 'Fine weather always brings us callers. You Greyboroughites remember Netherleigh exists. Hark! surely that is Donald Bain's assumed drawl?' and he opened the door leading on to the stairs; 'and, by all that's incongruous, little Busteed with him—a couple more of Fraulein's wasps. Both swells with a difference,' and he went back to his seat.

'Why wasps, Mr Hawthorne?' asked Geoffrey.

'Well, the wasp looks considerably after himself; but the funny thing here is that the wasps frequently get stung. Unconsciously that girl hits out with home truths, and it may do some of them good.'

'But what about the peach?'

'Oh, they find it much too hard for them, but the comedy is amusing.'

'Is it fair for the peach?'

'Ah, my wife looks after that; but there is precious little need of her assistance.' A maid appeared at the door and announced that Mr Donald Bain and Mr Busteed were in the drawing-room; and saying, 'Come, Mr Lowther,' John Hawthorne led the way down to the room with the balcony overlooking the tawny sea.

Mrs Hawthorne was talking with Mr Bain and Hilda Jordan with Mr Busteed, who sat on the edge of his chair with the palms of his hands flat together, his fingers extended as though in prayer, but between his knees; and his feet, in faultless, glossy, patent leather shoes, twisted in at the toes. They all rose as the two men entered and quickly the chat was general between the group.

'Well, Mr Bain, are we to lose you from Greyborough? Going to join the great actor? I see you were *fêting* him the other night. Now if we lose you, and Mr Busteed gets married and leaves us, what shall we do?'

'All our amusements would be gone,' said Fraulein; then leaning towards Mr Busteed she said, 'But you surely are not going to get married?'

Mr Busteed had resumed his position on the chair edge, his thumbs stuck out from his flattened palms, and a weakly smile came over his pale face as he said, 'But you wouldn't like to see my name in the *Times* under the obituaries, would you, Miss Jordan?'

'No, no, you mustn't die yet.'

'Die!' and he seemed to think for a moment, and then said, 'Oh, I used the wrong word, I suppose. My memory is really very bad. Do you know, I meet lots of people, and they tell me most interesting things, only I forget them. I could be very amusing if I only had a good memory.'

'But, Mr Busteed, you really are always amusing,' said Fraulein, solemnly. 'But who is the lady?'

He leant over to her chair and said, in a solemn whisper, 'No one. There is Miss Maitland, she would marry me for my money. Oh, I know them! I'm not going to be caught and then find out it was only the money they wanted,' and in his spirit of energy he got up from his chair and moved to the window, a move that invited the others to cluster round it.

'Here's Mr Bain talking of giving up acting,' said Mrs Hawthorne.

'Oh, but you could not,' said Fraulein.

'Eh! but I could,' retorted Donald, with a broad Scotch accent.

'Why don't you sometimes play Scotch parts?' asked Geoffrey; 'your accent would be so excellent.'

'Perhaps Mr Bain had enough of Scotland in his youth,' said John Hawthorne.

Donald looked inquiringly at him as though wondering what he meant.

'You Scotchmen don't often go back over the Border.'

'Border—what is Border?' asked Fraulein Jordan.

'Border, Fraulein? It is the line that divides the Scotch from the English.'

'Oh, then Mr Bain has overstepped the Border, as you say.'

'Very often,' said Mr Busteed, solemnly.

'Ah!' exclaimed Donald, who felt the smiles all round seemed somehow to be against him, 'I have too much Scotch affairs and correspondence in my business, and looking after my own money matters. There is a Scotch mortgage I hold now gives me a great deal of trouble; I do not want to play Scotch characters as well. I'm not like Mr Lowther here, selling pictures all the week and painting them on Sunday.'

Geoffrey started at this sudden turn upon him, but before he could speak, little Mr Busteed's thin voice chimed in,—

'Oh, Mr Lowther is always studying; I saw him with a lot of books under his arm. He's a regular dipsomaniac.'

'A what!' came the general exclamation.

'Why, what is it they call those people that get such a love for old books? It isn't dipsomaniacs—that's prigging, isn't it? I know these words but I can't think of them, you know.'

The smile became a positive chuckle of laughter.

'Bibliophiles, bibliomaniacs, you mean,' said Mrs Hawthorne, kindly, to save the little man's discomfiture.

'Oh, yes, of course, of course—about books, isn't it?'

'You know more about your lovely silver, don't you?' said Fraulein, kindly, and at the risk of being told she was looking after his money she led him to the end of the room to show him some cups won by Mr Hawthorne in his younger days. Their withdrawal gave Mr Hawthorne the opportunity to ask Donald what truth there was in the rumours

about the Maitland losses. Was it true they were poor?

'Lost heavily; the business their money is in is going to the dogs, and their investments are in Colonial land companies that are paying nothing.'

'I'm so sorry for Evelyn.'

'Ya'as, she's an awfully nice girl—awfully nice.'

'Oh, she will have to marry old Habgood, Mr Bain,' exclaimed Mr Hawthorne.

'It's beastly to be poor,' said Donald.

'Beastly suits the other alternative best,' said John Hawthorne, as his wife turned away with Geoffrey, saying,—

'John has just hinted to me your hopes, Mr Lowther. I do so heartily look for your success.'

'I shall owe much to your husband and to you, Mrs Hawthorne.'

'Oh, but we have never helped you.'

'You little know how much you have helped me. Let me tell you, your home is the only intellectual one I enter freely. I can never thank you too sincerely.'

'Not much culture in our talk just now,' said Mrs Hawthorne. 'Oh, they are going,' and she left him to say good-bye to the two visitors.

As they went out of the door Fraulein came up to Geoffrey, who still stood near the window, her face now its usual pink and white complexion, all the flushed hue gone. 'Are not they funny people? Oh, we do get funny people here!'

'Including Mr Cubberley,' said Geoffrey.

'Nasty man! ugh!'—said Fraulein; 'don't talk of him.'

'Why not? Has he annoyed you?'

'Don't talk of him. I forbid *you* to do so.'

'Nor of Mr Busteed,' said Geoffrey.

'Oh, the funny little man! I do like him, he is so funny.'

'And Mr Dawne?' continued Geoffrey.

'Ah, he is nice! Don't you like him? Why not?'

He did not know why not, but he suddenly felt he did not. But his enumeration of the wasps was interrupted by the re-entry of Mr and Mrs Hawthorne, the latter saying,—

'Now we can talk sensibly. That Mr Busteed is getting too funny. Dipsomaniac! If ever you are tempted, Mr Lowther, let this warn you.'

'You had better have told Donald Bain that, wife,' said her husband. 'That "Nine" club is no good to him, I'm sure. You don't go there often, I hope,' he added, turning to Geoffrey, and without waiting for an answer said, 'Don't.'

In after years Geoffrey remembered with intense pleasure the remaining time he spent that winter's afternoon in John Hawthorne's house by the sea.

The talk in the twilight, ranging over books and pictures, men and things, as the sun sank beyond the Welsh hills; on men like Sidney Cooper and Edwin Long, who from poverty had risen to be famous men; of the beauty in great work, in painting, or in literature. Then the cosy tea, with the children on either side of their governess, the whole family together; the friendliness and geniality of the home, the cordiality of host and hostess, and the quaint phrasing of Hilda as she talked half in German, half in English, to the ruddy, hungry children.

At one moment Midge suddenly looked up, and with mouth half full, said, 'Is Mr Lowther going to marry Fraulein?'

'Midge! Midge!' said her mother.

'Is Mr Dawne, then?' said the child.

'No, Mr Cubberley; I saw him try to kiss her,' blurted out Bobby.

'Oh, Mr Cubberley always gives his pastoral kisses pretty freely,' said Mrs Hawthorne; 'I'm always afraid he will kiss me.'

The sound of the scuffle came into Geoffrey's ears, and the hue of Hilda's face as she burst out from the room, and he looked across towards her to see she was very busy helping the youngest child to some toast.

The winter's night drew on and he must all too soon quit his friends. Mr Hawthorne accompanied him some short way on this homeward walk, and he trudged on beneath the night, full of hope for the future and thankfulness for his true friend; and ere the Sunday had come again he had spoken to his employers and obtained leave freely for his journey to London on his all-important errand.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FIRST RUNG OF THE LADDER

It was on a chill, wet, February morning that Geoffrey Lowther was up betimes, and at last set out for London to see if there was aught in the promised friendship, won by his work, of Herbert Barker.

They were an excited little family that morning in the tiny surburban home. His mother was busy seeing his breakfast was ready, his blind sister had felt her way down the stairs to 'see' him off, and the schoolboy Jack was most intent on the fact there was an extra good breakfast, ''Cos Geoffrey was going to London.' It did not generally run to meat for breakfast.

He had got on his overcoat, and his mother was holding his hat, when the sister Mildred—patient Mildred, as he called her—came across the room. None would have thought her blind then, so quickly she walked to him, and putting her hands on his shoulder she said, 'God guide the ship safely.' It was a prayer an Eastern traveller had told Geoffrey the Arabs chanted as they shot down the Nile cataracts, and it had clung to her; and she used it continually now, it was so short but so full of meaning. And so Geoffrey left the home that his work held safely over their heads. He would want his blind

sister's prayers, for he was going into dire temptation.

As the train ran on out of the western falling rain into the sharper air of the more eastern counties the day cleared, and in the better light Geoffrey took out of his bag the MSS. upon which he was going to risk his chances, and went carefully over them, finding slight errors he had overlooked; and the many hours' journey soon slipped away and he was in London.

He made at once for Mr Barker's rooms in Lincoln's Inn, and was told he was out, but at two o'clock would probably be at the 'Dogberry.' So after a long, slow stroll down Fleet Street, with longing looks at all the myriad names of newspapers on every floor, on almost every house of that street, he got back into the Strand and penetrated up the dark, wide old stairs of the 'Dogberry' Club.

The stairs were very dark, but he guided himself by the stiff old black railings, and on the first floor came on a little landing where was a little table with a long book and a pen lying on it; a signature book apparently. Over it hung some clever sketches of old English homes, and a caricature of someone. The stairs went on, but two doors opened on this landing, and he was in doubt what to do when one of these doors opened and a short, black frock-coated man with a highly-polished bald head appeared.

'Who was you wanting, sir?' he asked, unwittingly using Jane Austen's phraseology.

'Is Mr Herbert Barker here?' asked Geoffrey.

'Oh, yes, he's lunching with Mr Arthur, and—but step this way, sir,' and inside the door Geoffrey

found himself in the presence of four or five men at lunch.

'Gentleman asking for you, Mr Barker,' said the polished head.

And Geoffrey saw his friend of The 'Nine' Club start up and come forward, but then halt as though in doubt. 'You have forgotten me?' he said. 'Geoffrey Lowther of Greyborough.'

'Ah! Mr Lowther! Yes, yes. I got your note. Sit down; have some lunch.'

'But I mustn't interrupt you. I'm so sorry to burst in.'

'Oh, that's our way here. Damn ceremony with the Dogberries. Let me introduce you. Mr Lowther, art critic for—I forget your paper, but never mind. His articles have been very useful to me.'

'Well, you want a lot of help, old man,' came from beneath the dark moustache of one who had been introduced as Captain Hodson of the *Naval Review*.

'You'll have some lunch,' said Mr Barker, heedless of the sarcasm.

But Geoffrey declined.

'Well, then, a glass of wine; and you smoke.'

'But you are eating.'

'That doesn't matter, and we've finished;' and he threw his napkin on the table and said, 'Come in to the other room; perhaps you would rather have coffee.' And he led the way across the little landing into the opposite room, that was lighter, looking out into a small square, and furnished with leather-backed easy-chairs and a stiff, uneasy couch.

There was no one in this room, so Barker pulled a

couple of chairs up to a little table by the fire, and as soon as a lad had brought in the coffee and some cigarettes he said, 'Now then, Mr Lowther, I know your time's short; let me see what you have brought with you.'

Geoffrey produced the four MSS. and sat with anxious trepidation, letting his cigarette go out more than once, as his friend smoked and sipped his coffee, and looked over one after the other of these MSS.

At last he had glanced at all four and laid them in a line on the table; then he took up the middle one, saying, 'That's no good—purely local. Who the devil cares about Greyborough events? We look on it up here as a distant province. You must place that locally, but make 'em pay for it. Well now,' he ran on, taking up another MS., 'that's no good. Too stiff. "The development of Greek and Egyptian Art." A big subject—too big for you,' and he put that with the Greyborough rejected. 'Now this one, "Art in the Home," that's all right, but you're not flippant enough; be flippant, Mr Lowther, be flippant. You're nothing if you're not flippant, and the more sacred the subject, why, the more flippant. Yes, be a jolly sight more flimsy in the first par., and that will do. And then the other one—"Nature's Composition" —seems good—very good. Those old chaps who used to lug a tree in here and a hill in there, because Nature wanted helping, simply owned their eyes could not see how grandly Nature composes. How deliciously harmonised are her scenes! But it is not everyone knows the best seat in the house from which to look at 'em.

'Now, look here,' he ran on. 'What's the time? Just three-thirty. Good! Now I will go with you to a couple of my friends and introduce you. Don't leave the MS., we'll talk about that after,' and he took up the Greek and Egyptian one again and began once more looking at it.

Suddenly he said, 'Where did you get all these ideas? That about the passing from the stiff machine figure to the soft, yielding, glorious outlines of Nature itself. Ah, it's a great subject! I believe you could master it, but to do it properly you must go to Greece and Egypt.'

'And not be flippant?' fell from Geoffrey's lips.

'Oh, this is *tout autre chose*. We have some pleasure left in life amidst all this folly. There are some good things left, but most of us here have to live. You have something behind this, I hope?' and he laid his hand on the MS.

The thought flashed through Geoffrey's mind, 'Should he tell this new friend all?' But he thought as promptly it would sound like an appeal of poverty, so he said nothing, and Herbert Barker rose up, and together they went down the dark stairs, out into the rushing, busy Strand. The next moment they were passing a window full of photographs.

'There,' said Barker, 'there is Greek Art at its climax.'

It was a grand photograph of the Hermes of Olympia. 'And there,' he added, 'is one of the most free bits of Egyptian Art. I think the man was a steward or foreman of some great lord. I forget the history of

it at the moment.* The one is as full of natural art as the other, yet so opposite in treatment. Ah, you should go to the East. I wish to God I could.'

'If you cannot, how can I?' said Geoffrey.

'Ah, I don't know, wait a bit,' was the answer.

'What can he mean?' thought Geoffrey; but they hurried on now up a street where a combined smell of cabbages and turnips and onions told them they were near Covent Garden, and entering a door his friend went up a steep stair, three flights, and tapping at a closed door said, 'Shall I come in?' to which a voice answered, 'Yes, come in;' and in they went, into an untidy, dirty little room, where a tall, handsome man was seated at a table that was covered with piles of very dirty MS., strips of proof, copies of illustrations, and piled by the side were all types of art magazines of various lands. Geoffrey just had time to notice on the door the words '*Artistic Review.* Mr Sanderson.'

'Hallo, Barker!—um! thought you were alone,' said the handsome one.

'Brought Mr Lowther—Mr Geoffrey Lowther—just to introduce you. You remember I told you about his work; thought you'd like to see him. Then he can send you what you want.'

'Glad to see you. Chairs short here.'

'Oh, all right. I'll sit on the table,' said Barker.

'Well, Mr Lowther,' said Mr Sanderson, 'I shall be glad to see something from you. We can use a good deal on Art in relation to modern life. Make it readable.'

* Probably the photograph of Shekh el Beled, a wonderful piece of wooden sculpture now in the Gizeh Museum. Found at Sakkara.

'Say flippant, old chap,' interrupted Mr Barker.

'I must tell you we don't pay much yet—we are only starting—say a guinea a column, and our columns are wide and long. But that's the best. Then you can send us occasional pars. when you have anything noteworthy. Oh, I have read some of your work. Mr Barker has shown it to me. Will that suit you?'

'I shall be only too glad to write for you, and thank Mr Barker.'

'Well, that's all right. Now you know your man, and we'll toddle off.'

'I am busy, look in again,' said the editor, and he put out his hand, that Geoffrey shook and rather liked the touch of it, for it was an honest, firm hand, with a genuine grip to it; but all the long examination-like talk he had expected had been condensed into this two minutes, and they were out of the rooms and descending the steep, dirty stairs.

'Now look here,' said Mr Barker, as they reached the bottom. 'A queer thing happened this morning—only just thought of it. I was in the *Daily Amuser* office, and they showed me a most incoherent letter from a man who has been sending them notes demanding a big sum of money. Drunk, probably. They said they must get someone else to do these notes. They pay very well. Now, couldn't you do this? Notes on any incident or event that the U. K. will think interesting on Art or Burglary, Science or Murder, Literature or Adultery, but flippant, remember, flippant.'

'But, Mr Barker,' urged Geoffrey, 'if I am always writing this flippant, as you term it, work, when shall

I have time for anything solid? I do want to do some good work.'

'And so do I, so do most of us. Do you think I—do you think Sanderson there likes all this mere scribbling and compilation? No. But think of this, Mr Lowther; if you write for the *Amuser* hundreds of thousands read your work—I mean rubbish. Put a gem or two in amongst the rubbish, the few will seize on your gems, and so you will do some good even on that paper. Shall we go there?'

Geoffrey was in wonder at this offhand, to use his own pet term, flippant man, who had this under crust of love for all that was earnest and uplifting, and he answered, 'If you will take me. I don't know how I shall thank you for all your—'

'Oh, stow that! I shall want you to help me some day.' And away he started.

The office of the *Daily Amuser* was a very different place to that of the *Artistic Review*.

The entrance corridor was laid with coloured tesseræ, a well-furnished waiting-room was on the right-hand side, and in it as they entered were seated several 'waiters,' mostly ladies; but Mr Barker passed this and the inquiry office, and went on up the marble flight of stairs to the first, and the second, and the third floor; and then along a passage until he came to a door with the word 'Editorial' upon it. He entered this, and they were in a long office shut off into little wooden boxes, with a narrow passage running past the doors. He tapped at one of these, but getting no answer he opened it, and Geoffrey saw it was very small, with a desk, two chairs, and a gas stove filling it with bad odours.

'That's the literary editor's room,' said Mr Barker; 'we'll go on to Cobden's room.'

'Cobden?' echoed Geoffrey.

'Yes, a regular Free Trader; gets everything he can from abroad, even his illustrations.'

At the end of the corridor was a room with the name —Mr Rutherford Cobden.

On knocking a voice was heard to say, 'Come in'; and in they went.

'Oh, Barker,' said the gentleman seated at a table without rising. 'How are you? I'm awfully busy.'

'Yes, I know you are, but I shall save you a lot of letters. I've brought you someone from Greyborough to do that queer chap's work.'

'From Greyborough, eh? The very letter I was writing,' and he held up a sheet of paper.

'Exactly so! Well, this is Mr Geoffrey Lowther. He is writing for the *Artistic Review* and other papers and will just hit your wants.'

'Sit down, Mr Lowther; take a chair, Barker.'

There were plenty of comfortable leather chairs here, and the room was well carpeted and everything in good order; but the table, a large one, was covered with papers, MSS., proofs, and a number of foreign periodicals.

The talk did not last long, and when they rose to go Geoffrey Lowther was the accepted correspondent of the *Daily Amuser*. He did not like the title, and he hardly loved the work, but he determined to see what it meant and to make it a stepping-stone. Was ever man so fortunate as in a few hours to get work accepted in two London papers?

As though divining his thoughts, his friend asked

him suddenly, 'How long have you been writing for the *Greyborough Gazette?*'

'Oh, for years,' he replied.

'Exactly so. Your work is better known than you think. And they paid you nothing?'

'Not a *sou*.'

'And yet it is such work as yours that makes the reputation of such a paper. I suppose the proprietors are rich?'

'Very.'

'Well, mind, see they pay in future, or no work. Damn them!'

Geoffrey expected that would mean no work, but his heart was light. The *Artistic Review* of London would well compensate for the local *Gazette*.

'Now I must leave you,' continued his friend. 'When do you go down?'

'To-morrow.'

'Well, look in at the Dogberries at 6·30, sharp, mind, and have a bit of dinner. Oh, I don't believe I told you who those fellows were; you might like to know. Well, Hodson runs the *Naval Review*. Anything about sailors of any time and of anywhere suits him. Then you noticed the broad-shouldered, solid, round-headed man with a thick moustache and glasses—I saw him look at you.'

'He was sitting near you?'

'Just so. Well, that's Dalton, the War special; seen enough in the last five years. Three campaigns, not a bit of an idea what fear is, and a splendid writer—facty, reliable, but delightfully picturesque; he's worth knowing. Well, then, that giant, broad chap, with the

heavy voice, well, he too is a special, good mark for a shot, but he writes boys' books and novels.'

'Not Mr Jessop?'

'That's the man, and that thin little chap near him makes his money by simply drawing dogs, dogs, dogs, dogs till he's sick of 'em, but they will have 'em, however badly they are drawn. Cairns—'

'Oh, I know his work,' interrupted Geoffrey.

'Of course you do, everybody does, that's the point of a speciality; but it's nauseating to the artist.'

'And public in time,' hinted Geoffrey.

'Oh, it's wonderful what they swallow. But now you will know who you are talking to if you are there before me; you will find out the others, or old Brown, "the polished one," will introduce you. No more time now. Good-bye; 6·30, mind,' and he was swallowed up in the hurrying procession of the Strand.

Geoffrey went west along Pall Mall to a firm he had to call on for his employers. What a curious clash it seemed from the talk on creating, and the talk on selling the creations, or more frequently manufactures.

This task done, he had time to stroll westwards along Piccadilly; he halted before the Royal Academy, looked into the central court, where the pigeons fluttered about, and thought of his hopes and ambitions that every May had been intensified. Now, what if his pen should gain for him what he had hoped for from the brush? Then the swift movement of the last few hours ran through his brain as he went on and crossed into the Green Park for a little quiet.

Had he gained what he wanted? Certainly the *Daily Amuser* was not what he had dreamt of or hoped for. The *Review* gave hopes, but even that suggested being led by the crowd rather than leading. But it had placed his feet well on the first rung of the ladder, and up it he would go let but health be granted him.

He was back at the Dogberries at the exact hour. Barker was not there, but one or two were in the general smoking-room waiting for dinner, and there was no formal stiffness; the members said good-evening to him in a free and friendly fashion, and the chat was general. There was none of the Greyborough 'Is he wholesale or retail' inquiry on every face and the terrible dread of saying something one ought not to. Not but what a good many 'ought not to's' were said in this club, but they were of a different order to the Greyborough idea of exposition of ignorance.

Suddenly 'the polished one,' as Mr Barker had dubbed him, appeared at the door and stated that dinner was ready, and there was a move for the dining-room. Geoffrey hardly knew what to do, but the burly Jessop said to him, 'You are coming in? Barker will be here directly; we'll put you next to him,' and in his blunt, genial tones there was a sense of welcome that put Geoffrey at his ease.

There were but a dozen men at the table, but the lively chat and repartee soon proved that they were all relaters or makers of current history. A chair was vacant on his right, for his 'late host' as Jessop dubbed Mr Barker, but on his left was a slim, light-featured young man with a fair moustache, who was

talking across the table to another fair-complexioned man ; and Geoffrey soon learnt from questions put to him that he had been instrumental in crushing a serious native rising in South Africa.

'Under fire pretty often, eh?' asked the opposite man.

'Nearly every other day.'

'Hit?'

But once, in the neck.'

'The devil!'

'Thought I was done ; turned down collar and found skin only grazed ; spent bullet.'

'Had good men with you?'

'One splendid fellow—Bourgogne.'

'What Bourgogne, of the *Shield?* Was he under you?' and a hand was put across the table. 'I was with him when he was killed.'

'What, in the Soudan?'

'Ay, only a few minutes before the shell burst I had asked him for some smoke ; he handed me a handful of cigarettes. I rode one way, he another, the shell was for him.'

'The polished one' was standing behind the speaker, and suddenly interrupted with, 'You know Major Cawling? Mr Crosby of the *Banner*—Major Cawling.'

'Look here, Brown,' ejaculated a dark-whiskered man at the head of the table.

'But I see the gentlemen didn't know each other, sir,' interrupted 'the polished one.'

'And they ought to ; quite right, Brown,' said Barker, as he entered, and laying his hand on Geoffrey's shoulder, as he sat down, said, 'So glad

they brought you in. Apologise.' Then to the whole table, 'I say, there's a wire; looks like a real row in the East.'

'China?'

'No, Persia this time.'

'Then Fergusson will be in it.'

'Ay, he'll go out to his death once too often,' said one.

But a strong argument at the other end of the table was rising to hubbub point.

'What?' said a voice above the others, 'Schiller a greater poet than Goethe?'

'Goethe was a philosopher, a learned man, but Schiller was the poet,' was the retort from an elderly man in a clerical garb.

'But, my dear sir—'

'Goethe could not have written "Der Taucher."'

'What about Heine?'

'Heine! bah! a rhymster! Don't talk of Heine.'

But his friend was speaking to him, and Geoffrey heard no more of this discussion. He wanted a dozen ears to take in the talk all round him, but the cheese was soon on the table, and one at the end of the room twisted his chair round to a piano that was near him and began rambling and rippling over the keys, and at last developed into a charming melody with a well-marked, taking refrain.

'Like it?' he said suddenly turning round, for all were listening. 'Will it go?'

'That's Dorothy's song in the new piece at the Universe,' said Barker, quietly.

'Play it again, old chap,' said the dark-bearded

one, and again the pretty lullaby air rippled forth.

'Who is the player?' asked Geoffrey.

'Oh, Donatelli, the composer.'

'Italian?'

'No, English: forebears Italian?'

A clattering on the table told the composer the Dogberries liked the song.

'Sing us the baritone song,' asked the bearded one.

And after a preliminary rush up the octaves, and a modulating from one key to the other, Donatelli trolled forth a robust song of the popular order, but not of the musical quality of Dorothy's air.

The diners partly disappeared as he was singing, but six or eight were left, cigars were lit, other members came in, and the night grew late ere Geoffrey was aware of it, for the news of the world seemed to dribble through this club, between snatches of argument, bursts of song, and sharp controversy, and noisy chaff.

'Well, masters,' said one as he rose to go, 'an' there be matter of weight chances, call up me,' quoting Dogberry's sententious syllables.

'Do you expect anything?' asked Mr Barker.

'Don't know, but the times are out of joint, dear boys.'

'Well, your headlines aren't going to put 'em right. You should copy the Daily Ticklers and put some truth in now and then.'

'Don't. Comparisons are odious, dear friend. Do not compare our headlines with the Ticklers.'

Geoffrey rose to go whilst this bit of cross-firing was passing, and his friend led him through a cloak-room that connected the two main rooms of the club, in fact, save a cardroom, the only rooms, saying as he did so,—

'I'm glad you have been up and that we were fortunate enough to meet our men; let me know when next you are up, and don't forget to send the stuff.'

'It may be a very long time—' began Geoffrey.

'Nonsense!' interrupted his friend; 'keep in touch with us. We shall soon have you up here altogether.'

The thought of his home flashed across his mind, as Mr Barker helped him on with his coat.

They emerged into the smoking-room, where some men had just come in from the theatres, passed through it, and on the head of the stairs he said, 'Good-night,' adding, 'I am very grateful to you, Mr Barker; I cannot repay you.'

'Don't! One likes to have a little credit account open somewhere,' was the reply, with a warm shake of the hand, and Geoffrey went down the old oak stairs, out into the quiet little square, and into the noise and rush of the Strand; crowds pouring from the theatres, ladies in evening dress hustled by news-boys shouting 'Extra Spechul!' Men and women of all grades and all virtues mixed in a hustling, chattering mass of humanity, in touch for this moment, then separating into how different lives. On he went, amidst it, full of the events of the day, so crowded with life, it seemed to him; epoch-making in his history he hoped. In after years

to be looked upon as but a string of very minor and unimportant incidents, but always to be remembered for the pleasant sensations of a new outlook to his life that clustered in his brain as he turned out of the hubbub and glare into a quiet, dark street where was his modest lodging; and as he rang the bell a sense of gratitude to his new friend filled his mind, for he had befriended him for his work; it was his work—his work alone that had earned for him this friendship and this foothold on the first rung of the ladder.

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

ON A BOURNEMOUTH LAWN

TWO years of life in a provincial town works sometimes but slight change either in the inhabitants or their surroundings; and save to two of our little group of Greyboroughites the stream of life had gone on in the unvarying, equable fashion that leaves no exciting, time-marking incidents.

But to Evelyn Maitland these twenty-four months had not been kind; whilst to Geoffrey Lowther they had passed with marvellous rapidity, for they had been packed with work.

When he came back after that memorable night with the Dogberrians he had boldly ventured to call upon the proprietor of the *Greyborough Gazette* and humbly asked him if, in future, they could not pay him something for his work.

'Well, Mr Lowther, we can, of course; but there are dozens who will do it for nothing.'

'Do they know anything of their subjects?' asked Geoffrey.

'Quite enough for our readers, but still we like your work, and we can give you seven-and-six a column. I ought to have said five shillings, but we will make it seven-and-six to you.'

Geoffrey thanked him and was about to leave,

when the proprietor stopped him by saying, 'Oh, by the way, you ought to be a member of the Journalists' Union. I'll propose you at the next meeting, as you are on our staff.'

'Is the subscription much?' asked Geoffrey.

'Oh, no, half-a-sovereign, but we expect all our staff to belong to it. I shall probably be President of this branch next year.' He did not mention he might want another vote or two to secure the Presidency.

So Geoffrey became a full member of the Union that meant to raise the pay of journalists all round—so some of the members told him at the first meeting he attended. Geoffrey thought five shillings for 240 lines wanted raising, but, as a new member, he said nothing. He had not yet begun to earn from his London work, but ere six months had elapsed, articles had not only been accepted, but printed, and he seemed at last to be about to reap some slight harvest from all the work he had done for nothing; but yet all work he had enjoyed, and that had taught him so much.

He rarely now saw Miss Maitland. Her picture-buying days were over, she had said, and he heard she had left Greyborough for a time—some said to economise, others said for health.

But anyone who had seen her on a soft sunny day in the March of that year, strolling hatless on the wide lawns of a Bournemouth private hotel, would hardly have thought it was for health she was there.

Her face was tinged with sun and sea, her brown hair, drawn somewhat low down over the forehead,

was slightly dishevelled by the westerly wind that was forcing its way through the belt of pines that sang and sighed with the wind even as the song of the sea. The grounds she was strolling in were on the edge of the sandy cliffs that looked out southward. Just out of the gate, beyond the thin belt of wood, there was an unbounded view of the sea plain away towards France. But she went not out of this gate, but patrolled the lawns with a touch of sadness in her face that betrayed the thoughts that were working within her brain.

The life at this *pension* was very pleasant. Enough visitors to be interesting, and sometimes some good music in the evening, and quiet hours for good reading out in this glorious, life-giving air, with the intermingled scent of pine and sea soothing and lulling the brain from wear and worry. But her mother could not forget, nor let her forget, why they were there.

'And how long this will last God only knows, said the old lady, 'for everything seems being swept away from us. Why don't you get married, Evelyn?'

'Who, mother? Mr Donald Bain, perhaps. And become an actress to keep him in fur coats.'

'Oh, but people say he has property in Scotland. Don't believe it, child. Mark my words, that man's an actor.'

'Oh, we all know that, and he acts well.'

'Do not interrupt me. You are absurd, and I know you don't mean anything with your Mr Donald Bain. There is Mr Habgood, now.'

'Mother!'

'Oh, mother! as you will, the man is a very good soul, I am sure. He is already Mayor of Greyborough,

and they say he will be M.P. at the next election, and I shouldn't mind saying he will be Sir Henry if ever he could get some Royalties down here.'

'But, mother! Look at him! Listen to him!'

'Oh, that doesn't matter. I should like to see you Lady Habgood, my dear. I believe he is a good man; see what he gives in subscriptions!'

'Yes, and starves all his workpeople.'

'My dear, that's what the working people say. They are improvident and then blame their masters. I know them. You would have that lovely place at Greyborough, and all those pictures—and you love pictures.'

'But think of it, having daily—ugh! to hear him speak of them.'

'Why, I heard you say to that man at the gallery you loved to talk of pictures.'

'Yes, I did.'

'Well, then, you would have what you loved, and if he gets M.P. I would get him to have a town house and you would go everywhere. I'm sure you would be Lady Habgood.'

Evelyn shivered.

It was over their morning cup of tea in their own rooms that this talk had taken place, but Mrs Maitland had not told all she knew; she was afraid her daughter would be absent all day for days if she did, and on this morning she had said she hoped to go for a walk ere mid-day, and so Evelyn was strolling in the grounds waiting upon her pleasure.

She had wandered down to the edge of the grounds, and was standing amid the bushes under the pines, eyes and ears and nostrils filled with the beauty and the sound and scent of the free, glorious Nature

around her. She was happy. Nature had swept all sense of care from her soul, and she drank in the beauty, lost in calm happiness.

'Evelyn!' Her mother's voice penetrated through the shrubs; she turned, pushed them on one side and burst out on to the lawn.

Her mother was coming towards her with that short, terrible figure, with the long, greyish, sandy beard flying in the wind. What a crash seemed to come to brain and heart—from all the beauty to this.

But as she appeared Mr Habgood hastened towards her, raised his immaculate new hat and held out his right hand long ere he reached her. 'Oh, Miss Maitland, you will be surprised to see me.'

'I am—indeed!' she gasped.

'I'm so glad Mrs Maitland did not say I was coming.'

'Did she know?'

'Oh, yes;' and as her mother came up to them he said, 'Why, the sea air is playing 'avock with your tresses.'

The man was getting poetical. Oh, how she hated him for breaking in on those pleasant dream thoughts. If he had but known on whom they were fixed he in his wealth would have perhaps despised her.

'Mr Habgood is actually going to stay some days in Bournemouth, my dear. Isn't that nice?'

'Will you help me to understand its beauties? Your mother tells me you know every nook of it.' She determined to give him such a tiring on the first walk that he should never ask again to accompany her, but she knew not Mr Habgood's persistency yet.

'There,' said Mrs Maitland, after a few moments' chat, 'I will go in and get a shawl.'

'Let me go,' exclaimed Evelyn.

'No, no. I really had not finished dressing. You talk to Mr Habgood. I shall soon be back,' and the old lady walked up the lawn, leaving Evelyn alone indeed with Mr Habgood.

'We miss you very much in Greyborough,' said the great little man.

'I can't say that I miss Greyborough very much,' was the retort. 'There are so few interesting people.'

'Oh, but at my receptions we get all the best people.'

'Yes, they always fill the refreshment-rooms very early,' thought Evelyn, but she said nothing.

'I so wished you were at one we had last week. I think everyone was there.'

'Did you invite any artists?'

'Oh, no! We have no well-to-do artists, poor fellows!'

'Were there any writers there?'

'Oh, yes, we always ask the Press.'

'Ah, I was not thinking of the reporters.'

'But who do you mean, Miss Maitland? Who ought to be there? You know how I revere any 'int from you upon such matters.'

Evelyn bit her lip, cross that he should so have twisted her quiet sarcasm to his purpose.

'Who would you like to meet at my receptions?'

'Oh, great people,' she burst forth with; 'look back a hundred or two hundred years and see whose names are alive now, and invite those people to-day; but they would mostly be poor.'

'I don't quite take you,' said Mr Habgood.

'Oh, it does not matter,' said Evelyn, and walked towards the house.

'But it does, it does matter much. Your opinion is a great deal to me, a very great deal, more than you think. So many in Greyborough say your tact is so hexcellent. Hi—'

'Oh, you need not call mother. I will fetch her,' interrupted Evelyn.

'But I was not calling her. I assure you I was only going to say, somewhat hemphatically perhaps, I thought your judgment hexcellent. Oh, Miss Evelyn, we miss you in Greyborough, we do indeed. This year, as Mayor again, I regret it more than you will understand.' He turned round and faced the pines on the cliff edge. 'Miss Maitland—Miss Evelyn, there are reasons for your living here. I know them. Will you not let me do away with those reasons? I can do it, and will, most freely.'

'Really, we are very happy here. I don't know what you mean.'

'You may not be able to live here always.'

'What do you mean, Mr Habgood?'

He moved on into a little path that led between the shrubs, to where a rustic summer-house stood.

'I know more of your affairs than, perhaps, even Mrs Maitland knows. I know her troubles, and I have told her I will 'elp her.'

'How very kind,' muttered Evelyn, in a wondering, dazed mood. What did his words mean?

He led on into the summer-house, and sat down, saying, 'I have walked very far. Shall we sit down until your mother comes?'

Evelyn sat down silently, dreading his next words, and wondering why she had not left him and ran into the house; and now she was sitting by his side, and, as though her near presence was as an electric shock to the little man, he burst forth,—

'Oh, Miss Maitland—Evelyn, I hadore you with hall my heart. It is useless to 'ide it. I did not mean to speak to-day, but can I 'ope? I can lay a good deal at your feet. I'm Mayor—'

A sickly smile came over Evelyn's face, and he saw it. 'Oh,' he ran on, 'you don't care for that, I know; and there isn't much in it except expense; but it does make the Greyborough people knuckle under.'

'Oh, don't, Mr Habgood, pray don't,' gasped Evelyn.

'But I must,' he exclaimed. 'They will make me M.P., and I may be Sir 'Enery. You shall have your town house. You shall have all you wish for, and Lady Habgood will be received—heverywhere.'

'Yes, with a laugh on their lips,' muttered Evelyn. 'Oh, it cannot be.'

'It can be. Oh, I adore you with hall my heart. I do indeed, Evelyn. Let me call you—Hevelyn.'

'No! Mr Habgood. We are old friends, and I think you mean well, but this cannot be,' and she stood up.

'Do you know you are downright poor now? I have to tell your mother that even the debentures of the Goldcross Mining Company are worth nothing.'

'Oh, don't tell her; let me break it to her,' gasped Evelyn.

He drew near her and took her hand. 'Why tell her at all?' and he became the pompous Mayor. 'I hoffer you my hand and my 'eart. I do indeed; they are yours; and as Lady Habgood's mother—yes, let me say it—it will come—Mrs Maitland shall live at ease.'

'It cannot be! oh, it cannot be! You are very good;' he pressed her hand as she spoke, she tried to withdraw it with a shiver, but he held it. 'I can never—' the word love would not come to her lips.

'Oh, you will get to like me. Everyone does after a bit. Think of what your life will be; with me haffluence, without me poverty.'

A thought flashed through her mind of another career that, even with straitened means, would be preferable to his affluence, and she felt assured, and shook his hand firmly, as she said, 'No! Mr Habgood, this cannot be. But I thank you for your generous offer. Oh, there is mother. Let us be friends, let me know all to break it to her.' And she went out of the shadow of the trees into the full sunlight.

'What! hiding from me,' exclaimed the old lady. 'Ha, you young people. I brought your Tam-o'-Shanter, Evelyn.' The other young person came slowly forward, and the three paced out of the gate on to the cliff's edge, and Evelyn drank in the free sea air; she felt escaped from a prison cell.

That night, when at last the wealthy Mr Habgood had withdrawn himself from the searching gaze of the other diners in the *salle-à-manger*, after a somewhat lengthy stay there, for Mrs Maitland did not quite like yet to submit him to their still closer inspection in the drawing-room, Evelyn had gone to her room,

and was sitting with the window open, listening to the distant thud of the sea and rise and fall of the voice of the waters as the wind rose or fell, and brought to her this nature music, when the door opened and her mother entered.

'Oh, do shut the window, my child; you will catch your death,' and the old lady quickly pulled down window and blinds, shut out the night and turned up the gas. 'There now, that's comfortable,' she exclaimed. 'Now tell me, what had Mr Habgood been saying to you in the summer-house? Oh, I saw there was something. He is coming again to-morrow.'

'Oh, mother, cannot we go away?'

'Certainly not! Go away! when he has come, I believe, purposely to see you. Did he say anything? I should like to see you well settled, Evelyn.'

'Would you like me,' and she stood upright, 'to marry that—man?'

'My child, he is wealthy, moves in good society.'

'Society!' exclaimed Evelyn, in a terrifically sarcastic exclamation.

'He's sure to be M.P., who knows what besides, with his money, and I believe he is a good man.'

'Would you?—oh, mother, think of it—the intimacy, the degradation! that man;' and she put her hands to her face, as though she saw the misery of that degradation.

'Oh, as to intimacy, you know, Evelyn, in society, women see so little of their husbands. He would have the House, and his business and clubs; and you, my dear, with his wealth—why, your receptions would be one of the things of the season. Let me see, Lord

Cotswold has a house in Portman Square; they are roomy, those old houses. I should so love to see you receiving your guests, and Evelyn, my dear, I fear even this poor, miserable life here cannot last if we get any more bad news. Would you like to live in poverty, actual poverty?'

Evelyn shuddered. She knew now of shifty subterfuges that made her sick at heart, and she knew too better than her mother that worse must come. But the sight of that man's form, the remembrance of the touch of his flabby, untrue hand, sent a positive pain through her veins; and swift as an electric flash all the meaning of married life, at least at its outset, swept through her mind. Where love should be, detestation would be; it would take, at least, months ere she could decently shun his presence. She must sell her body wholly to him for his money.

'Mother! I cannot, will not marry him,' she exclaimed.

'Oh, he is not bad. Who else will you marry? There is no one with his wealth; and, Evelyn, you are no longer young; and when people know we are downright poor! Oh, my child, think of the two different lives. There, I must go to bed. Good-night. Just think of it, but not too much, or you won't look well for him to-morrow.'

But Evelyn Maitland did not see the wealthy Mayor on the morrow. She kept her room and refused to come down, and Mrs Maitland had some bad news of her affairs from his lips. She knew that they were indeed poor, compared to their former wealth.

CHAPTER XI

CAPITAL OR CULTURE

GREYBOROUGH was excited. It was just the close of the season — for Greyborough had its season. All the dances and parties were over, but one big event was still forthcoming. An effort was being made to found a public Art Gallery, a public subscription had been opened, and the list for subscribers had been started by the President of the Artists' Association, a neighbouring baronet whose family had made their wealth in the city, but who did not now reside within its borders. He headed the list with a guinea, which was unfortunate, as it made some who had promised five guineas withdraw their names; but the artists were anxious the thing should go forward, so they had enlisted the aid of a famous London Academician, who was to come down and give a short adress on Art, and, *faute de mieux*, their worthy Mayor was to receive the guests, the local artists not daring to venture upon such an impertinence to Greyborough Society as to nominate one of their number to fulfil this important task. Rumour had it that all the learned men of Greyborough would for once be seen mingling with the city men, that deans and professors might converse with city committee men. Money and learning was to

commingle, and the wives and daughters of these sections of Greyborough Society might even bow to each other.

The artists had sent invitations to everyone who was anyone, to meet their famous guest, for they intended issuing a circular to follow, with a form for subscriptions attached to it to the same *invités*. Some of the wary ones knew this, but the wives and daughters were all anxious to be present at this 'interesting and important function,' as Charlie Mudd termed it in his *Chatter*.

Charlie was 'in it now, dear boy.' Did large type pars in the *Gazette*, regular up-to-date, settle-it-all, sort of style. And if he did come a cropper now and then, he could 'fake' an explanation with the best; or, better still, not insert contradiction. He had referred to Mr Habgood as one whose interests were so varied that he might well be termed a regular Admiral Crichton; and someone had kindly hinted 'admiral' was not the right word. But Charlie pointed out that there was a par close by on naval manœuvres, and that accounted for the slip. Though he said to himself, 'What the devil is the word then?' He had always heard it called Admiral Crichton.

Charlie meant to let himself go over this 'function,' as did some of the daughters of the wealthy citizens. He knew his col. the next morning would be more read than anything else in the *Gazette*, even if the Government was thrown out, or war declared. He had well-laid-down rules of his own, such as a picture was never a picture, it was always a 'frame' and now and then a 'canvas.' He described Mr Blank as having six 'frames' well placed; and in musical

criticism a piece or a song was always 'unfolded.' These and other little mannerisms proved amply his capable descriptive powers, and when the great evening dawned, and the *salons* of the local Art galleries were fast filling, Charlie was not far from the door to note the 'big pots' and, on this occasion only, the artists, who arrived.

Soon the galleries were filling with well-dressed men and women, and more pretty girls than could be found in many a big Continental city, save perhaps in Arles, where Greco-Roman beauty seems to have found an abiding-place.

The crush in the central *salon* was great, as name after name was called, and the Mayor, wearing the broad gold chain and painfully prominent white gloves, and the R.A. shook hands with the incomers.

Suddenly Charlie 'spotted' (he rarely 'saw' anyone) Mr and Mrs Hawthorne, and that German girl and Lowther, and with them 'old Donald.'

Donald stopped and shook hands with him.

'On the job, old chap? Don't forget me.'

'*Non possumus*,' answered Charlie. 'Miss Maitland's just gone in; doesn't look as though it was true.'

Donald only meant to halt for the moment, but this pulled him up, and he ranged himself just behind Charlie for a word—on this, to him, important matter.

'What's the latest?' he asked *sotto voce*.

'Why, that everything is gone, and we shall see a public sale in a week or two.'

'Good God!' ejaculated Donald.

'But she's all there to-night, and the old un,' said Charlie.

'See you again,' said Donald, and he moved on, amidst the still incoming crowd, to where the R.A. and Mayor were shaking hands blandly, as though they liked it, with all Greyborough; around them was a group of some of the 'best people,' or rather the richest. The learned set had not yet arrived, but talking with Mrs Maitland stood John Hawthorne. Geoffrey Lowther had not ventured to halt in proximity to this chief group. Near by was a little knot with Miss Maitland, looking very charming, in slightly décolleté dress; her well-shaped neck adding a grace to the clear, intellectual face and well-formed head. Her eyes were lit with smiles at what appeared to be some word from Fraulein Jordan, whose little figure was near her.

Donald edged his way betwixt the dress entanglements of the clustered groups, and as he approached them, he heard Hilda's voice saying, 'This is delightful—pictures, and music, and pretty women. Ah, Mr Bain, you like pretty women!'

The strange bluntness of this girl always annoyed him; so he said sarcastically, 'Who would be so ungallant as not to admire you, Miss Jordan?' and turned to Miss Maitland.

'Oh, it would not matter if you only admired me. Would it, Miss Maitland?'

'It might be serious for Mr Bain.'

Donald felt he must get away from this girl, or some broad Scotch might burst from his lips, hardly in his usual Greyborough form.

But Hilda stayed his move with 'Could Mr Bain be really serious?' Then, turning to Miss Maitland, said, 'It must be delightful to be rich.'

Donald saw his chance for a home thrust, and he said, 'You have never experienced that delight.'

'I! rich!' laughed the young girl. 'But I know how I should spend my money.'

'How?' asked Miss Maitland.

'Books, pictures, music, travel. Oh, Miss Maitland, you know how to enjoy these pleasures.'

Miss Maitland sighed, and the thought rushed to her brain, all that was past. She turned aside, and her eyes saw that little, long-bearded form smiling and bowing, ay, and being bowed to quite reverentially. Oh, how people revered wealth! But she turned suddenly and said to Hilda, 'Yet I think few are happier than you are, Miss Jordan.'

'You mean I am poor. Yes; but could you be happy so?' Then, seeing the flush of pain that passed over Evelyn's face, she felt the talk was too personal amidst this shifting crowd; but Donald saved her further words, for he said, 'Are you not going to pass through the rooms, Miss Maitland?'

But as she turned to move away with him, the Mayor stepped from his position and said to her hurriedly, 'We will keep you some chairs for the address, Miss Maitland; you will enjoy that.'

Evelyn bowed, but the smile with which she meant to thank him did not come. She turned to her mother, but she was chatting busily; and Hilda had turned to Mrs Hawthorne, and so she slightly bowed to Donald, who piloted her through the chattering, packed masses of Greyborough fashion, proud to be the favoured one of Miss Maitland, although he heard more than one murmur as he passed with his fair companion, and distinctly came the words from one

girl's lips, 'She can do better than that, if it is true.'

On they went, halting to look at a picture, or passing a few words with some friend, until in the third room they found a string quartette was playing to a very small audience.

Greyborough had the reputation of being musical, but it, that is, rich Greyborough, never listened to music when it could talk. But the quartette was good, and Evelyn sat down, and as Donald was about to speak she made a sign that suppressed his words.

A classical quartette was hardly what he wished to hear; he had not led her here to be silent. Her face had always attracted him, but still more her position; and he assured himself he was not ungrateful to her. Perhaps these money matters would come out all right. She was quickly absorbed in the music; and, nursing his knee, he leant forward and watched her face; ay and her neck, and bust, that rose and fell, just veiled by some slight lace.

Yes, she was handsome, would make a handsome wife; it would fix his position; but was it true? Was she poor? A movement was ending, the harmony hushed itself down in a long-drawn, sweet chord, just faintly breathing, and Evelyn Maitland looked round with joy in her eyes, as she exclaimed, 'Is not this delightful?'

Donald leant forward, saying, 'To me enchanting. Would I could always so please you, Miss Maitland!' Then, in a lower tone, he added, 'To give you pleasure is indeed—to me—a joy!'

She started and looked at him, their eyes met, his fell upon her bust. She felt the meaning in them—

possession. She was conscious of the blood mantling neck and face, and started up, and yet she looked at him as he too rose. A well-built, ay, handsome man, in full youth, his face betraying a life certainly not ascetic; a life already debasing, sensualising the face. It was but for a second her eyes rested on him as he stood there; but in those eyes was also another figure, and that scene at Bournemouth. The contrast in mere flesh and blood was terrible, but again his eyelids lifted, and she saw in his eyes something that sent a chill tremor through her whole body, and with a shiver she said, 'The music is over. Shall we go?' Even as she spoke there came into the room, as all the few listeners were leaving it, Hilda Jordan with Geoffrey Lowther; and, as though to a refuge, Evelyn stepped up to them saying, 'Oh, you are just too late, such a delightful quartette! Do sit down here, they may play again.' Then, turning to Geoffrey, she said, 'Will they establish the Art Gallery, Mr Lowther?'

What was it that caused this low tremolo in her voice? Some agitation; could it be the music? He looked across to Donald, but he, with head thrown back, was with his grandest air talking to the little governess.

'Well,' he answered, 'if success begins where failure is imminent, I should say there was a decided chance of our having the Gallery.'

'Is failure so imminent?' she asked with a firmer voice. 'Has not that article of yours roused them?'

'They have not read it. At least the President has not. You have read it?' he asked, looking up into her face.

'Of course I have. Why, I always read your articles, Mr Lowther; I told you so before.'

'And that makes me try to make them worth your reading.'

'Not because I read them,' interrupted Hilda. 'You never told me that, but Mr Hawthorne always shows them to me. I enjoy them.'

'Oh, now, you are flattering!'

'No. I'm not flattering; if I flattered anyone I should flatter you, but I don't.'

There was a little laugh through the group at this naïve, downright flattery, and Miss Maitland said,—

'Mr Lowther wants to make Greyborough believe in Art, Science, Literature, everything that's nice. It will be hard work.'

'Ah, well, it is to profit others we are in this world,' said Geoffrey, 'and it's a pleasure to write even if so little seems to come from it.'

'Mr Lowther hates ignorance,' exclaimed Hilda. 'D'on't you know the quotation,—

> "With ignorance wage eternal war,
> To know thyself for ever strain,
> Thine ignorance of thine ignorance,
> Thy fiercest foe, thy deadliest bane."

Why, that ends with your name, Herr Bain,' she said, turning to Donald. 'Ah, you do study yourself, don't you?'

'You make us study you,' retorted Donald.

'Ach,' she answered, looking towards Geoffrey. 'Kein Talent, doch ein Character.'*

* No Talent but a Character.

Miss Maitland smiled at her boldness and her judgment of Donald, but she said to Geoffrey, 'Do you know German?'

'I am learning, and, thanks to Mr Hawthorne and Fraulein, I get some practice.'

'You seem terribly fond of work. They say opportunity is kind to the industrious.'

'But work, congenial work, is the joy of life.'

'Can it kill care?' she asked.

'Of course it can; it is the sole thing that can kill care. Ah, Miss Maitland, you are of the favoured ones, and know not what care means.' Then, after a pause, he added, 'Nor yet the joy of successful work.'

'I hear you have been very successful lately,' she answered, touched by his enthusiasm.

'Not very, but *ça marche.* It is easier work in town than here.' He said nothing of the numerous MSS. that would persist in coming back over and over again.

'We shall have you leaving Greyborough.'

'It is a very long way from that yet,' said Geoffrey, decidedly.

'We should quite miss you.'

He looked up into her face as she spoke.

Donald Bain had strolled to the other side of the room with Hilda, where a genre picture was attracting them. She paused ere she said slowly,—

'It is unkind sometimes to say kind things. But I mean it most emphatically. I should miss you, I shall always remember our talks—'

She stopped short, for his eyes shot forth such a look of intense pleasure that hers were fixed upon

them, and he said, 'Then my work has indeed given me great joy.'

'You must teach me some of this enthusiasm for work. Do you think I could really paint anything worth looking at, or—' and she halted ere she added, 'worth selling.'

'The pictures that live are not the pictures artists live by, is true of pictures as of books,' he said. 'If you threw your soul into your work it would be good work—real, live work; but it is the spur of poverty that forces such work.'

'Would you like me to have that spur?'

'God forbid! But it is a marvellous spur.'

'Think of the gnawing care.'

'Give yourself no time to think. Fill your whole time with work. Lose yourself in your creations.'

'Oh, is that possible?' she asked.

'More than possible, and the more so when one has help from your kind words. Oh, Miss Maitland, you have given me the spur of words that will help me,' and he looked into her face, and she felt an impulse to stretch forth her hand to him. But his next words chilled her, for he added, 'Fraulein Jordan's quaint sayings always help one, she is so outspoken.'

He was placing her then on a level with this governess; and she remembered who he was, a poor shop assistant. Her training rebelled against her condescension, but her whole mind crushed back this rebellion with the thought, and 'more worth talking to than all the whole buzzing crowd.' But she had no time to think, for Donald strolled across to her with Hilda, and as he did so the lower door

opened and her mother entered. The old lady's astonishment was decidedly expressed at the sight of her daughter seated with this picture man and a German governess.

'Good gracious, Evelyn! How can you be so thoughtless? I do believe they are waiting only for you, the R.A. and all of them.'

'I would rather stay here, mother,' she said.

'What!' exclaimed her mother; then, taking her hand, she said in a whisper, 'With these people! when the Mayor and President!—Don't be absurd.'

Evelyn rose, and with a bow to Geoffrey said, 'I hope we shall finish our talk another day.' She was led away as her mother was heard exclaiming, 'You are really too absurd.' Donald followed them, and Geoffrey was left alone with Hilda, even the hum of the crowded rooms was shut out as Donald closed the door behind him.

'Don't you want to hear the R.A.'s speech?' said Hilda.

'I have it here,' he answered, and produced a proof pull from his pocket, 'and I have written and sent my notes on it.'

'Oh, lovely,' she exclaimed, and pulling a chair close to his, she sat down very near him. 'Let me read it.'

'No,' he said, 'and you must not tell tales.'

'But suppose he had not spoken it?'

'I could have stopped my notes by wire.'

'So! but why not have sent your notes by wire?'

'Oh, even millionaire proprietors don't mind saving wires.'

'So! Will they give you millions some day?'

'Not even marks, Fraulein.'

'Oh, but they do. I know of a man in Berlin, an Englishman, who writes for an English paper and is very rich—wirklich sehr reich.'

'Oh, yes, a *Times* correspondent, perhaps.'

'And why should not you be a *Times* correspondent?'

'Fraulein!'

'Ja, warum nicht, mit Ihrem erstaunten "Fraulein." You will soon talk German. You read French well, but oh, your outspeaking—and you write lovely.'

'Fraulein, you said you never flattered; this is rank flattery,' but his eyes sparkled at her words. They gave him pleasure, though suggesting so utterly impossible an outlook.

'I don't flatter. You English don't work. You do,' she said enigmatically, 'and you will go far. You know you will. You feel you will.'

'Yes, but they are already beginning to try and crush me.'

'Oh, that means success. Wasps only bite at the best fruit. Who are the wasps?'

'Never mind.'

'Oh, Mr Hawthorne will tell me.'

'You must not ask Mr Hawthorne or say one word of this.'

'But I shall know it. Oh, I am so glad they are throwing stones at you.'

She seemed in great glee, and rubbed her hands, whilst her face, rippling with smiles, looked out at him as she said archly, 'When you are *Times* correspondent write to me, won't you?'

'I will,' he said, and held out his hand. That

soft, chubby hand lay in his, and as they so shook hands a burst of applause came in from the great room.

'Ah,' he said, 'the R.A. is actually moving them.'

'Oh,' she exclaimed, 'perhaps it is the Mayor. Oh, do come in; he is so funny! Come, we must hear him.'

He would rather have stayed where he was. He had lived a very pleasant half-hour, an unusual half-hour, but she had risen; and the two went out from an upper door that led round to the lower end of the central *salon.*

They heard the end of the great speech Geoffrey had in his pocket, and then the Mayor arose.

He went on well for a time, but at last his measured phrases were shorter, and he spoke of the great artists Greyborough had given birth to, and ignored, nay, kicked out or starved. 'And now,' he exclaimed, 'as our distinguished speaker of to-night has just told us, we are elegizeing them.'

'Himmelich!' exclaimed Fraulein Jordan, 'lovely!'

'Ladies and gentlemen,' he continued, 'we must look around us and patronise local art.'

Geoffrey saw a shudder positively shake the R.A., but the Mayor went on:—

'We have great painters now amongst us whose pictures may be worth thousands some day. Let us 'elp hart 'opeful, and make our hartists 'ope, and we shall be helping forward our city to her place in the nations around us.'

He sat down amidst tremendous applause, and

the whole crowd rose up and stood in groups, some hoping to be presented to the R.A., others quickly disappearing lest the crush in the refreshment-room should block them from their food. The Mayor, with a really elegant bow, begged Mrs Maitland and her daughter would take some coffee, and again comments were passed by the local quidnuncs as Evelyn passed through the dividing crowds with the Mayor, the great man of the evening being with her mother.

CHAPTER III

A VERITABLE TOUCHSTONE

THE Hawthorne family had this winter given up their seaside home and were living on the outskirts of Greyborough, to be nearer to Mr Hawthorne's business, and he had arranged an evening for reading and talking German, to which he had invited Lowther, who was already studying both French and German at some night classes established in the city.

It was at the breakfast-table on the morning after the affair at the Art Galleries that Mr Hawthorne was reading his letters, when he suddenly burst out with, 'It's very queer, wife, how often those Netherleigh people are coming up to Greyborough; here's Busteed coming now, and he hopes you, and you too, Fraulein, are enjoying good health.'

'I expect it's Fraulein he is coming to see,' said his wife.

'Oh, the funny little man!' exclaimed Hilda. 'He told me he might have married Miss Maitland, only he knew she only wanted his money; and I told him that must be so, but he did not see it, he agreed with me.'

'And,' ejaculated Mr Hawthorne, 'here is just the thing for young Lowther if he can get away.

Why, Fraulein! what is your letter about? Look, wife, who is there can make her blush like that?'

But Hilda did not answer, but crumpled up a letter in her hand, and Mrs Hawthorne, seeing she was moved, called her attention to one of the children who was wanting more toast to divert her thoughts, then she said suddenly, 'What is that about Mr Lowther?'

'Why, that new ship starts from Shields to Naples and the Piræus, and I'm offered a passage out for myself or any personal friend I would like to oblige.'

'Why is that so good?' asked Mrs Hawthorne.

'Why, wife, don't you see? He has made a bit of a name by articles on his studies of Greek art; and here he could get into actual touch with the real thing. They make a six weeks' run of it, calling at Alexandria.'

'How can he find the time?'

'The firm will benefit by his absence. They have already benefited by his writing, and the dull season is before them.'

'It is curious this should turn up just now.'

'Oh, wife, Circumstance, as we call it, is the will of God, and some folk don't heed Circumstance. They are too full of their own will and pleasure.' Then looking across to the governess, who had recovered her usual complexion, he said, 'Will you write a note to Mr Lowther and tell him to call here this evening to see me if possible? And also answer that and say I will let them know the name of a friend in a day or so, as I am unable for myself to accept their kind offer.' Then looking across to his little son Bobby, he said in German, 'Nun! Tisch Gebet. Ich muss gehen.' The child said its German

grace, and Mr Hawthorne rose and went to his own little library, where he generally had a read before starting to business.

He had been in his room about half an hour when a light tap came at the door. Thinking it was a child, he called out, 'Run away. You can't come in now.' But he heard Fraulein's voice saying nervously, 'Can I speak with you, Herr Hawthorne?'

'What's up now?' he thought; but he got up and unlocked his door, and saw the young girl there. 'Come in. What is it?' he said.

She came in and shut the door, and then without a word, handed him a letter that had been all crumpled up.

He looked up at her. She was now very pale. 'Am I to read this?'

'Gefälligst!' she murmured, and he read,—

'My dear Fraulein,—A friend has persuaded me to go over to —— and spend to-morrow with him. I could not trust myself to call on you in so short an interval, but I was glad to get a glimpse of you. I missed my train, and had to stay at the station until seven. I did so wish you could have been with me; anyway I hope to see you at Netherleigh soon. But I am engaged to preach at Greyborough on the 17th—morning and evening. Could you come to one of the services and stay behind and speak to me in the vestry? but if I can I will get over to see you on the Saturday preceding. I should so enjoy a long, quiet talk with you for an hour. You do not know how much I think of you, and how truly I love you. I should like to follow out your future life wherever spent, but I am sure God's own blessing will go with you wherever you go. You will acknowledge Him in all your ways, and He will direct your paths. I will not fail to remember you in prayer. Do not answer this note at all.—Ever your devoted and loving friend, Josiah Cubberley.'

He was amazed at the signature. He looked up in her face when he had finished.

'I will answer this,' he said. 'He is never to set foot in my house again. Has he tried to kiss you? He generally does kiss young girls.'

'I gave him an ear-box,' said Hilda.

'Ah! I expected as much; but this!' and John Hawthorne held out the letter in disgust, and handed it to her, and she tore it into small shreds passionately, and threw it into a waste-paper basket.

'I am glad you showed it to me. I shall forbid him my house here or at Netherleigh. You will not be troubled again with him, Fraulein;' and with a smile, that slowly lifted from her face its troubled look, the young girl left the study.

John Hawthorne's note to the Rev. Josiah Cubberley was very short. He forbade his calling upon any pretence, and that further correspondence would be by postcard.

John Hawthorne knew of the confessional in certain churches, and of the vestry confidences in certain chapels, and what they meant when young and pretty girls were shrived and comforted with fatherly advices. 'Ah!' he exclaimed, as he finished this unpleasant task, 'if "the churches have killed their Christ," these ministers and priests go far to strangle Christianity. What is there in this young girl that forces the real character of people to burst through their veneer? She is a veritable touchstone. Folk must show their real natures when near her. She will find us all out. No wonder that man preaches unctuously of Christian love, his thoughts are on lust.' As this thought ran through his brain his eye fell on

the torn fragments of the letter. 'Humph!' he said to himself, 'libel actions grow out of such letters as I have written; it will be as well to keep that letter, torn as it is,' and he lifted up the basket, and carefully gathering the torn, twisted morsels he placed them in an envelope and locked them up in some pigeon-holes in his library shelves. 'With that in safe keeping I shall hear no more of the highly Reverend Josiah. Perchance this may save him from utter degradation publicly.'

He was a little later than usual in getting to his office that morning, and the London papers were being cried in the suburban streets, so he bought a copy of the *Amuser*, and his glance soon fell on a local note upon the 'Public Art Gallery for Greyborough' and on the R.A.'s speech—highly satirical and sarcastic upon the munificent guinea of the noble President and upon the apathy of the citizens.

'A little different to the usual all-round butter,' he muttered. 'Well, it may do us good, but we shall take a lot of *Daily Amuser* girdings; still, it is read. It will please Lowther. Why, there he is!' and he saw Geoffrey cross over from a side road. He hailed him with, 'Here, Lowther. Here is something you will agree with.'

Geoffrey saw what he held in his hand and stiffened himself. He had told no one he wrote these paragraphs; he spoke only of the articles, so he merely said, as he looked at the note, 'It is true, isn't it, sir?'

'Yes, still they won't like it; but I'm glad I met you. Where are you going?' Geoffrey told him

he was on an errand to see some pictures at a sale in a house in the suburbs.

'Well, five minutes will do—or I will walk your way,' and he told him of the letter from his ship-owning friends and all it meant.

Lowther's eyes sparkled.

'Mind you live with the captain—sea fare, no luxuries—but it will cost you nothing.'

'Oh, sir!' he exclaimed, 'but how can I go?'

'The quiet time is coming on. Your people can spare you, and you will bring back a knowledge that will be of great value to them, only you must bind yourself to stay with them.'

'I am bound—bound tightly. I dare not risk the livelihood of my people. It is too risky this writing, but I've had other good news this morning. I shall remember to-day. They have elected me a country member of the "Dogberry"; and the *Whitehall Gazette* has accepted an article—that's better than the *Amuser*.'

'Oh, this is a rag; but still, you see, it says good things sometimes; that is a good rap at us,' and he tapped the local note with his hand. 'Well, now, make your plans, and remember this—we should always arrange that things we wish for may not come too late. So seize upon this circumstance; and, by-the-way, it's a little early to be preaching, but I have been mixed up with the clergy this morning. You said you were elected a member of the "Dogberry." Well, I know that type of club. It will introduce you to a lot of good men; but "never let your pleasures punish you" is a wonderful motto, and you may find it useful;' and he held out his hand, saying, 'We

shall see you this week for the German chat,' and he was gone.

Geoffrey walked on, dizzy with all the thoughts that crowded his brain—Greece, Italy, Egypt. He! The poor boy! Could it be encompassed? The *Whitehall* would have articles, and the *Amuser* notes, and the monthlies long articles. He wanted to run back and thank Mr Hawthorne—he had not done it, but then the thought of his present work came in, and away he went; pulled his mind together, and luckily he did so, for when he arrived at the house, in a small, rather dark room was a picture that struck him as a genuine Dutch masterpiece, if not a Rembrandt—a grand old Frau in white ruff and black dress, with that strong powerful work, and intensity of light and shade so characteristic of Rembrandt. A slipshod glance and he would have marked it to be bought; but he got it down from its nail, and still, when brought to the light, the work was very strong; he turned it over—the canvas was very dirty—he brushed the dust away, and faintly made out some letters that he quickly saw were part of the name of a firm still in existence and not two hundred years old. He noted all particulars and went on with his work.

As he walked back to the city he got into shape how he should approach his employers with Mr Hawthorne's proposals and kindness, but some days had to pass ere a good opportunity offered for this desperate plunge; for might it not lead to dismissal, and perhaps disaster to all his aims? And on the morrow he had a little interview with the local editor, who wished him to write a column on the Spring Exhibition of the London Society of

Painters. As some local men were exhibiting he decided to give *space* at least to their work in the local print, and he knew he could get time for this; and it would enable him to see his 'Dogberry' friends, and perhaps fix articles that would pay the land expenses of this Eastern journey.

So again that week Geoffrey was climbing the old stairs of the 'Dogberry'; now as a member, a recognised writer on the London Press. Again 'the polished one' greeted him and told him at once Mr Barker was not in, but Captain Hodson and Mr Jessop and one or two more would be in to lunch. 'Keep a place for you, sir.' But he knew not if he would have time, so simply said, 'Tell Mr Barker I've called.'

'What name?' said 'the polished one.'

'Geoffrey Lowther.'

'Why, of course, sir. New member. You was elected last week; very glad to see you, sir. I knew you was a friend of Mr Barker's, but you know how names kind o' slip out of the mind. Oh, yes, I'll tell Mr Barker you'll be in to dinner.'

'No. I'm going now to the Society of Painters.'

'Why, that's where he is; you're sure to see him there to-day. I heard him say it's the Press view.'

Geoffrey wasted no further time but bolted to the rooms of the society, received his catalogue and went up the stairs. He had to be back in Greyborough that night. No time to see editors, but he hoped for a word with Barker.

He halted at the door of the first room and looked round. Four or five men and one lady were silently studying the pictures and making notes; but Mr Barker was not there, so he began his work. The silence was so different to the chatter of the Press view at Greyborough, where the reporters who were told off to write on Art were too glad to get the artists themselves to tell them about the pictures whilst they threw in the up-to-date Journalese. Here at least thought and study were being brought to bear; but as Geoffrey went on round the room and looked on paintings of Karnak and Athens, of the Pont du Garde and the Mortaratsch Glacier, of Norwegian fiords and English lakes, he felt sick at the task before him. There was a Capri scene with a sea bluer than he could ever deem any sea to be. Was the artist colour mad? How could he say, who knew none of these places? There was an old gold light on the pillars of the Parthenon at Athens, and a positive violet hue to the hills beyond. The thing seemed absurd, and a cry went out from his soul, 'God give me the chance to see these glories of this world, then I shall have the right to speak of pictures of them.'

But he had to write about them, there and then that day, so he fell back on English views and genre pictures and portraits, and only spoke of the manipulation and technique of the artists who dealt with scenes he knew nought of; but even here he felt ashamed of his presumption in writing upon the work of men gifted so far beyond himself in execution, though he felt his eyes could see good work and detect false pre-

tensions. He passed slowly on round the three rooms, enjoying, revelling in the beauty around him with the leaping thought of what might be before him.

He was standing before an Eastern scene strong in intense light and as intense shadows, full of peaceful colour and breathing of hot atmosphere; he felt it was a true picture, but he only noted its strength and the very careful execution, when he felt a hand laid on his shoulder. He started, for his mind was absorbed in his work. It was Barker.

'I would not interrupt you before,' he said *sotto voce*. 'I saw you were in it, but I have to go. Come down to the refreshment room, we can talk there. Whose toes have you been stamping on in Greyborough?' he asked when they reached the room.

'No one's.'

'Haven't you? You are going to catch it. Well, have a drink and be thankful; it looks like success when your neighbour begins to say he can't see anything in you.'

Then turning to a little knot of three men near he said, '"A good man and true." A new Dogberry, Mr Geoffrey Lowther, a most "desartless" man,' and after a hearty hand-shake the chat became general on the pictures and the absence of the work of certain artists; but Geoffrey was wondering all the time what Barker had meant by stamping on Greyborough toes.

Ere long the three men left to get back to their work, and Barker was going, but Geoffrey stopped

him with the question, 'Why do you think I have riled someone in Greyborough?'

'Because they received a letter at the *Amuser* office saying you were not on the staff of either of the Greyborough journals, and could not be in a position to send news. I wanted to tell you of it; but take no notice of it. It's just one of the first signs of success; you will get more of it, and here's plenty of it to you,' and he finished his sherry and bitters, adding, 'Now ta-ta, I must get off. Come in to dinner to-night.'

'I cannot. I must go down again,' said Geoffrey, and they parted on the stairs, Geoffrey going back to the pictures, having had no chance of a word, as he hoped for, about the Eastern journey, but with the thought worrying him who was trying to do him this mischief.

He got back to Greyborough late that night, writing his article in the train; but as he passed 'The Nine's' Club he thought he could run through the article there, and correct it and drop it at the office and then get to his home.

It was already nearly midnight when he quietly opened the door, and as the theatre was long closed, he expected to find no one there; but a light was burning at one end of the long room, and a figure was bending over some books, with a glass and bottle and syphon near it.

As Geoffrey walked up the room he kicked against a chair, and the figure started up with an oath and 'Who the devil are you?'

'All right, Mr Bain,' said Geoffrey; 'sorry to dis-

turb you.' He saw Donald had some receipt and account books before him.

'Why, Lowther, dear boy, who the devil thought of seeing you this time o' night? Have a drink? Yes, you will. Oh, it's all right—good stuff,' and he shut up the books hurriedly and swept them aside, and threw a paper lying near over them.

'Deuced lot of work these books. Fellows don't pay subscriptions, and don't, believe, pay for drinks. Oh, this is all right—my bottle,' and he laid his hand somewhat affectionately on the bottle.

'There is no check on it,' said Geoffrey.

'Who wants check? Oh, yes, cheque; want lots o' cheques. Must lock up these books.'

'Don't let me interrupt. I've just got an article to go through,' and he took it from his pocket and began correcting it; but he saw that Donald carried the books down to a cupboard, but there put two small ones in his pockets. 'To do the work at home,' thought Geoffrey, and went on with the correcting.

'Going to stop here long?' said Donald, as he came back.

'Not half an hour.'

'H'm. Have another drink?' But Geoffrey refused, and with unsteady hand Donald took back the bottle to the drink cupboard, that he locked up with the small end of the door key, and Geoffrey heard him mutter, 'What the devil want to come in now for?' And without saying good-night Donald was gone, and Geoffrey worked on in silence, finished the article, and turned off the gas and let himself out, handed his article into the night editor's room, and then started at a brisk pace for his home, the

wondering thought as to who was trying to injure him forcing its way uppermost again. But he did not know his interruption of Donald Bain in his club accounts would add fuel to the local hatred that was beginning to burn freely.

CHAPTER IV

NON-ASSORTED PAIRS

ALTHOUGH now living in the town, Fraulein Jordan had plenty of opportunity for good walks with her little pupils in the open country and woods that surrounded Greyborough, and her free, effervescing nature led her into many a romp in her favourite haunt, the woods by the river.

These woods skirted the road that led away to Netherleigh-on-Sea, and on one soft day in May she had been racing beneath the oaks, scrambling over embankments and through brushwood, away from the youngsters who were in full chase of her; her hat in her hand, her fair hair all blown about her hot face; when, as she appeared at the head of a slope, a voice saluted her with, 'Miss Jordan, you will really injure yourself getting so hot.'

'Oh, they will catch me. You must not stop me, Mr Dawne;' but before she could say more, a shriek of triumph burst from a cluster of bushes, and through it burst Bobby with a yell, 'Here she is;' and echoing cries came from the other youngsters as they all emerged, one by one, and clung to Hilda's hands and skirts.

'How happy they look,' said the pale-faced young clergyman.

'We *have* had a romp,' said Dorothy.

'Oh, come on,' said Bobby. 'You've got to catch us now.'

'No; really Miss Jordan must not run any more,' said Mr Dawne.

'Oh, hang,' said Bobby; which brought forth a warning, 'Bobby!' from Hilda, who was fanning herself with her broad hat.

'How lucky I took this path to rescue you from these young tyrants,' said the young clergyman.

'Quite a knight-errant. Well, they have made me a little warm.'

'Oh, do come into the shade. There is a tree trunk I have just passed, sit down there until you have recovered your breath. Do, Miss Jordan,' and he offered his arm, which Hilda took, and, still fanning herself, said, 'The children will hate you.'

'They seem to love you,' he answered, and looked down on her flushed face. She brushed back her blown-about hair, and, her eyes sparkling with the fun, said, 'You be the hare for them whilst I rest.'

'Yes, do, sir, do,' cried the youngsters.

'You would catch me at once, for I have just walked from Netherleigh;' then, as though to change the subject, he said, as they came to the old tree trunk, 'I hope Mr Hawthorne is at home.'

'He will be at six o'clock.'

'I fear I cannot stay until then,' he answered.

'Oh, you must not walk back, you are not strong, you look so pale.'

'Victor Hugo has said, "The true name of love is captivity. One is made prisoner by the soul of a woman. By her flesh also. Sometimes more by the

flesh than the soul. The soul is the lover, the flesh is the conqueror, the mistress."'

Was it the bright soul or the warm, palpitating flesh sitting near him on this old tree that sent a queer thrill through the Rev. Nicholas Dawne, who had taken this walk from Netherleigh to see someone besides John Hawthorne?

He had been accustomed to see her once or twice a week at Netherleigh. He could talk with her on the cliff path, or by the garden gate, on parish matters, without any suggestion he was yielding to any human passion unbecoming to a 'priest,' the word he loved to use. Was he not conquering the flesh? Had he not fasted vigorously through Lent? Did he not believe in celibacy for the priesthood? For were they not of a higher order of mankind, above the grosser loves of humanity? But sitting here in this wood by this warm, laughing, effervescent morsel of flesh and blood, he felt very human; he wanted to take that round, plump hand in his to caress it. He had swift visions of life with such a being, and of motherhood and children rising up and calling her blessed. The wrong sort of texts came into his head, instead of the tags on the holy life of the recluse, that abounded in a little work a brother 'priest' had lately sent him.

He sat there speechless for some moments, and Hilda looked at him. He knew it, but he dare not return the look. He felt he would have to clutch her in his arms.

At last he said in a low voice, 'How happy you are with the children. We miss you very much.'

'Really?' she answered. 'We shall be back again

soon, and I shall see you at church again.' Then swiftly rushed the thought of what this meant. His thoughts on her instead of on the 'office,' and he jumped up, saying, 'As Mr Hawthorne is not in I must return.'

'Certainly you will not,' and she rose, laid her hands on his, and added, 'Why, you would faint on the road; you are trembling now.' So he was, but from the touch of those hands. 'No, you come along at once and have some tea. Why, Mrs Hawthorne would scold me; so come along,' and she put on her hat and linked her hand on his arm, and, with a call to the children, who had disappeared in the brushwood, the couple strolled on under the trees, Nicholas Dawne taking her hand and placing it more firmly on his arm with the excuse, 'You must be really tired.'

They had not gone far before they saw ahead a short old gentleman and a lady coming towards them. 'Oh, lovely!' quietly exclaimed Hilda. 'Actually the Mayor taking a country walk. Poor Miss Maitland.'

'I hear they are to be married,' said Mr Dawne.

'No! Oh, that's too horrible, it's only gossip.'

'I think it is true.'

'Marriage without love must be hell!'

'Then what about love without marriage?' he exclaimed, and not until the words had left his lips did he see their whole meaning.

But the other couple, deeply intent on some talk. were close to them, would have passed had the path been wider. But they suddenly had to look up, and Evelyn saw who was before them, and the blood

rushed to her face at meeting this German girl; it annoyed her. But Mr Hapgood spoke to Mr Dawne, ignoring Hilda, and in contempt at the news just imparted to her by Mr Dawne, she but said 'Good afternoon' to Evelyn, and calling to the children strolled on, leaving the three talking. But her companion soon caught up to her, saying, as he rejoined her, 'Why did you not stop? Have you quarrelled with Miss Maitland?'

'How can I respect her if what you say is true?'

'But she will be very rich.'

'Oh, Mr Dawne! I will quarrel with you soon. What are riches to happiness, to self-respect? *You* speak like that.'

'We find these rich people so useful to the Church.'

'Then it's no Christian church. Christ did not sniggle up to rich folk. Bah!' She was quite angry, and used her pupil Bobby's words in her indignation. But her companion halted, and facing her with some agitation said, 'You must not judge Miss Maitland too harshly. You do not know all. I hear they will be quite poor, she and her mother.'

'Then let her work!'

'But can she work? All have not your aptitude and love of work. Oh, Mr Hawthorne has told me of your energy. Do you still want me to see Mrs Hawthorne?' he added almost pleadingly.

'Must not we heap coals of fire?' she said archly.

'Then I am your enemy? Well, you are bound to forgive your enemies.'

She laughed at his turning her words to his favour, and on they went, soon emerging from the woods on to the main road, where opportunity for intimate talk

was gone; and with the children gathering round them, they arrived at the house, where Mrs Hawthorne greeted the young curate with a warm welcome.

It was not long before John Hawthorne's voice was heard in the hall, and as he entered the room, seeing the clergyman, he said, 'Ah, Mr Dawne. Glad to see you. Here is someone you know just come to tell me he is off to Greece,' and Geoffrey Lowther was seen behind him.

'Mr Hawthorne does not say through his aid,' exclaimed Geoffrey. Then, coming to where Mrs Hawthorne was standing, he added,' I came out to thank Mr Hawthorne again, for I have been able to arrange it.'

'And you are really going to Greece? Oh, take me with you!' exclaimed Hilda.

'Fraulein,' was the warning word of Mrs Hawthorne.

'Oh, madam,' persisted Hilda, 'but think of standing on the Acropolis. Oh, I should revel in it.'

'Mr Lowther will not have too smooth a time on board. You would not like being on a laden tramp in the Bay,' joined in Mr Hawthorne. 'But come, wife, hurry dinner. Mr Dawne here tells me he has to catch the Netherleigh train. You will stop, Lowther? Oh, but you will.'

And so this little dinner party *à cinq* came off that Geoffrey long remembered, for it was the first time he had ever been asked to dine in a private house at Greyborough. He sat next to the young governess, whose knowledge of Greek life proved his own ignorance, although on the Art of Greece he could more than hold his own.

The chat was very general, upon travel, and then on home topics, until Mr Hawthorne happened to say to his wife, 'Do you think Miss Maitland is likely to marry old Habgood?'

'Certainly not. I do not think she could do such a thing.'

'*We* met them in the woods!' exclaimed Fraulein.

Her words were as a jet of chloroform numbing all at the table into silence, and one of those strange moments came over all, when the inward thoughts are too quick for speech.

John Hawthorne was annoyed, for Evelyn was a favourite with him. The Rev. Nicholas Dawne dreaded Hilda would repeat his words uttered in the wood. Mrs Hawthorne was cross; whilst a strange, savage sensation went through Geoffrey Lowther's brain, and he felt the blood was suffusing his face. He could not speak, he bent his face over his plate.

At last Mrs Hawthorne broke the silence with, 'I don't think she can be so foolish. She had better marry a poor man and be happy,' and soon the chat again became general; but Hilda had spoken twice to Geoffrey without getting a reply. What did this abstraction mean? Why should her words about old Habgood have so silenced him? She had been enjoying her talk; he had been so eager to get information, had been asking her what translations in English, or German, of Greek authors he had better read, and now he had turned stupid. At last she said quietly, 'You don't like old Habgood, do you?' He looked up at her as though stabbed, and then, with a fierceness that she had never before seen in him, he said,—

'He is my patron, he has bought my pictures.'

'Oh, then, of course, you hate him; all clever artists hate people who take their best pictures from them.' Still she could not understand the change that had passed over him in these few moments. But just then Mr Dawne, glancing at his watch, recalled all to the fact that he had to leave early, and all rose to wish him good-bye. As he shook hands with Hilda, he said, 'Then soon we shall see you at church again,' and his hand lingered on hers until her answer came.

'We shall come with the summer sunshine.'

'And be more welcome,' he replied in a low tone.

When he had left, the two men went into Mr Hawthorne's room to talk over this Greek journey, and it was only just as he was leaving that Hilda again saw Geoffrey, when he came into the drawing-room to say good-night. 'I owe you much for all your kind help and information,' he said, 'it will aid me, I know, tremendously.'

'You must tell us all about it when you return,' said Mr Hawthorne. 'But we shall read your articles.'

'Oh, that won't be like hearing it from his own lips,' said Hilda.

'I can never thank Mr Hawthorne enough,' said Geoffrey. 'He has been very, very good to me.'

'Ah, but he did not buy your pictures, like Mr Habgood.'

'Oh—' an oath nearly burst from his lips. Why did she again bring up that man's name? But he suppressed his passion as his friend said, 'You must call and say good-bye, and we wish you lots

of pleasure, and I know we need not say lots of work.'

'Ay, pleasurable work,' said Geoffrey, and his face lit up, and the positive scowl that had passed over it fled at the thought of his journey; and, he, too, said 'Good-night,' and passed out on his long walk to his humble home on the other side of the town.

What imp of evil had been tempting Hilda Jordan to so worry him with Henry Habgood's name? What could the fact of his strolling alone in the woods with Miss Maitland mean? He, the man who spent all his time in getting money and notoriety. Why did she permit it? Was she indeed selling herself to the man she hated with a bitter, contemptuous hate? Could he speak? Tell her of his hopes, his ambitions. The mad energy one word from her would put in him! And be smiled at for his folly. He would not brook this. She was a woman, keen of perception—their many lingering talks, his own willingness to let their talk wander, from all sense of business, into friendly, intimate converse. She knew, must know, how her presence lit up his whole life. She did not, could not look upon him, poor as he was, as an inferior being to Henry Habgood. The thought sent a savage, triumphant feeling of superiority through his brain. If she does, let her marry him, and buy soul misery with the sale of her body. 'Ah, it's a beautiful body, too lovely for such prostitution. Perhaps another year will lift me from this life. Will it be too late? Then it must be. I will not brook rejection, perhaps scorn,' and he quickened his pace, tried to think of this momentous journey, but Hilda Jordan's question

'You don't like old Habgood, do you?' Her very look, with those blue eyes of hers wide open, kept forcing itself on his mind. Well, they had made him think out his course of action, and nothing save some decided word from Miss Maitland should make him swerve from it.

CHAPTER V

A STRANGE OMEN

TWO months' holiday, but a holiday that was to be crowded with work. Such change of work was far better than play, and Geoffrey's heart was light as he took his seat in a third-class carriage for his run to Shields, to embark on this voyage to Eastern lands.

All seemed to have worked in his favour. Just before leaving Greyborough, a well-known, energetic editor of a provincial paper had written to him, and arrangements had been made that he was to supply some articles for a syndicate of provincial journals; and this had been announced as forthcoming from 'Geoffrey Lowther, the well-known Art critic of the *Artistic Review;*' and the *Whitehall Gazette* had agreed to take serial articles and notes whilst he was *en route;* so that he had no fear that those dependent on him would suffer by his holiday; but it had been a sad parting in his little home. The sister's blind eyes were filled with tears, and his mother had entreated him to take care of himself for their sake, and both had clung to him in their last embrace, until young Jack had yelled out, 'Gosh! Wish I was going. There's no war on, mother;' and Geoffrey had turned on him with a parting shot, 'Mind I get a good report of you whilst I'm away or nothing for

you from Greece, mind,' and so he had got away from the little home that was full of love, if void of riches.

How crowded with intense sensation were the next two months! He messed on board the tramp with the captain and officers, but a new cook failed in the cooking at the start; and 'hard tack' instead of bread, and a thirty-six hours dank fog, with two close shaves of destruction gave him matter for his first article, 'A Foggy Adventure.' The steward turned out to be a Hamburger, and so Geoffrey got plenty of practice for his German, and he tried his French on an Italian in the crew, and picked up a good deal of that sailor's tongue.

They had sighted Finisterre ere the weather was decent, but by this time he was well inured to the heavy lift and slow heave of the laden vessel, whose decks were well awash most of the time; but now, as they steamed on down Spain's dry coast and Portugal's headlands, he could lie on the deck beneath the glorious sun and study and read; or go for'ard and talk with the men, who were mending sails or at other work; and his note-books were getting filled before he was aware.

Gib, glorious Gib, was passed, and Genoa, the first call made for. Three days spent amidst the old palaces, and his Italian seemed to grow apace; then Naples. His brain seemed awhirl as he wandered, sometimes alone, sometimes with the captain, under the smoke-capped volcano's heights; then away in a sea so blue, he knew now the artists did not exaggerate, but he saw, too, that few caught the light that was in the sea. Down past Scylla, the little

rocky town, past still snow-clad Etna, on away out over the sapphire sea to Cape Malea, until the ship's bows ran on into the Piræus and away ahead he saw on a square hill the pillars on the Acropolis.

When he stood on that height and looked out over the Ionian Sea, his head was bent in reverence, and his heart overflowed with thankfulness for that God had so blessed him; and for John Hawthorne's kindly thought that had given him this intense pleasure. How repay it?

He sat himself down on the wall in the little Nike Temple, and drank in the glory around him—the glory of Nature and the glory of man. How broadened was his mind in these weeks of travel, and how the kindly help of Mr Hawthorne and their governess had aided him to grasp, to understand much he had seen.

He suddenly started up and leaped on a great block of marble. The knowledge gained should make him a name. Down in the museums lying beneath him, in the old Greek capital, he had gleaned much on his Art theories, that were becoming facts. The clear, keen wind seemed to inspire him. If he could give words to all the crowding thoughts, the world must listen; and then came the thought of one face in Greyborough. Would her eyes light up as she read of the power that was filling his soul, and nerving his brain, to write that all who read must feel that power? She could not sink so low as to hire herself out to the money-getting machine called Henry Habgood for the term of his mortal life, longing for his death, until the longing made her a murderess in thought.

'No!' he said emphatically, as he leaped down from his point of advantage and wandered away between the vast *débris* of temples to where the famous Caryatides still stood before the Erechtheum. Their faces and forms recalled Evelyn Maitland, and he had before stood gazing at them in their beauty, his thoughts dwelling upon her.

But he had much to learn of Greek glory and Greek history ere he sailed out again across the Phœnician Seas to Alexandria, there to be aroused by fresh sensations. He dived back into a yet older history; to see so much made him long to advance southward in the wondrous land of Egypt, and try to fathom out all Nile's secrets.

It was the full flush of English summer when he again set foot in Greyborough a changed man. Changed in outward appearance, for this sea roaming had bronzed his face; and his contact with learned men, for his articles had been Masonic in their power of securing friendships for him, had given him an additional tinge of self-respect, that urged him on to better work whilst giving him added confidence.

The sea air had been a brain and body tonic, but he quickly found he would want additional nerve power to contend with the opposition his success insured him.

Some of his articles had appeared, others were forthcoming, and it was strange to read that he was ascending Pentelicus up the white marble *débris*, when, as in fact, he was sitting for hours over ledgers and back accounts. He required nerve power also to make him stick to all the arrears of work, but the loving greeting that had welcomed him, and the

thought that herein lay safety for those he loved screwed him down to his work ; and did not he owe much to his employers, who had given him so much time? But the knowledge he had gained was already repaying them.

The most important news in Greyborough on his return was that a royal duke was to be given the Freedom of the City ; rumour had it that this was to be postponed until a new Mayor was elected, although the event, if brought about in Mr Habgood's year of office, would probably secure him a knighthood.

But one morning Geoffrey was surprised to receive a note from the *Amuser*. He was to attend the little ceremony at the Town Hall of granting the Freedom of the City to His Royal Highness, and send half a column on it.

What does this mean? The London editors knew the date and hour, and not a word had been positively said locally. He went down to the City Buildings, and saw the city secretary, who was rather surprised at his call, as the notices had not yet been sent out. 'In fact,' he added, 'it is not to grant the Freedom, but to obtain the consent of His Royal Highness to a date when he will receive that Freedom.' But he promised a place should be reserved for him, the date and hour being correct.

'I expect old Habgood is taking care the thing shall be well noted,' thought Geoffrey, 'and has sent a word to some of the London men.'

'I am always glad for you to write upon our city matters, Mr Lowther,' said the secretary. 'But I'm told I ought not to give you any facilities.'

'Why not?' asked Geoffrey.

'Well, you see, you are not a reporter, and the local reporter . . .'

'Very few special correspondents are reporters, sir,' said Geoffrey. 'I shall not interfere with the police court work unless you have a *cause célèbre*.'

'I know, I know,' said the official; 'but I had a letter the other day about you. I was in the middle of your Schliemann article when it was brought to me.' Geoffrey smiled. 'You can afford to smile, Mr Lowther. I shall always be very glad to help you in any way. Good-bye,' and he put out his hand as a signal his time was valuable.

What underhand game is this? thought Geoffrey. Charlie can't be such a fool. Do they think they can kill my work by this sort of opposition. Idiots! But he was annoyed. After all the kindly, courteous aid he had received by men of high culture, during his Eastern journey, to come back and get this kick from his neighbours annoyed him. Who could tell him who had done it? Then came the thought, was it worth while knowing? Let them work underhanded, and enjoy their defeat, for he meant to succeed.

On the morning of the great event he was at the door of the Town Hall in good time, got a corner seat where he could get away quickly after the ceremony to wire, and then went outside to watch the arrival. It was picturesque. The crowds of people grouped amid the old houses; the few soldiers who formed a guard of honour, then the clattering up of the yeomanry and the arrival of the royalties. Awaiting their arrival on the steps stood the little, long-bearded, squat figure of Mr Habgood, surrounded by his councillors, but as

Geoffrey chatted with one or two he found that all had the idea that the Freedom was not to be actually given that day, but His Royal Highness was merely to signify his willingness to accept the honour at a later date; and yet the editor of the *Amuser* had written to him to describe the actual presentation of the Freedom.

He noticed Mr Habgood seemed unusually agitated, but he had to get back to his corner before the little procession moved in, and a picturesque sight it was as the procession came into the little old hall, hung with portraits of bygone worthies—a little scene, given a greater occasion, that would have been worthy some artist's pains to depict.

But to Mr Henry Habgood this was a very great occasion. He led the way to his chair of State, the royal duke on his right hand. He fumbled with his gold chain of office and welcomed His Royal Highness in well-arranged words, and, to the surprise even of his own councillors, proferred the Freedom of the City. The secretary was near at hand with the roll. The Duke's signature, and lo! he signed, and was a Freeman. The Mayor handed him a casket, in which the Freedom would be enclosed, and extended his hand to the new citizen.

He had gained his object. The royal duke had, during his year of office, been made a Freeman of Greyborough; he felt sure of his knighthood and of Evelyn Maitland. He forgot the royal presence, began to disrobe instead of passing with His Royal Highness to an ante-room. He essayed to take off his chain of office, but it caught in the fur of his cloak; nervously he clutched at it to unclasp it, and

suddenly it fell clattering on the floor. The Duke half stooped to pick it up, then remembering himself, halted; with difficulty Mr Habgood stooped and picked it up, took off his cloak, and so divested of the insignia of office passed down the little hall.

To Geoffrey Lowther this crash of the gold chain on the floor seemed to be an ill omen for the wearer. What did it portend? This mishap at the moment the wearer had seemingly gained, as he thought, the height of his ambition.

In his sketch of the little ceremony Geoffrey described this accident, adding, 'In old days this would have been considered an ill omen to the new Freeman, or to Greyborough, or its Mayor.' He thought in old Greek days the oracles would have been consulted, or the diviners called in to explain the meaning of this untoward incident, and but for his account few in Greyborough would have known of it, for the local writers said no word of the incident. They knew Mr Habgood was not a man to forget anyone who ventured to write aught he did not like.

After getting away his wire Geoffrey happened to meet with one of the older councillors, who was in a talkative but not genial mood. 'Why,' he said, 'old Habgood sold us all. Didn't know a word about it. We were all to subscribe for the casket, and he goes and buys it out of his own pocket without our knowing it.'

'Ah,' thought Geoffrey, 'my editor had received the tip from one who knew, and no one seems to have known but Mr Habgood himself.'

That night he used the chain incident as a peg on which to hang an article for the *Whitehall* on

'Omens.' What a terrible omen it really was none in the city of Greyborough knew until ere long the weird catastrophe came, making even Geoffrey Lowther wonder if there was aught in the omens so dreaded by the ancients.

CHAPTER VI

THE FLESH AND—

EVENTS moved rapidly for many whose lives are linked together in this Greyborough drama in the following months. Geoffrey's life was intensely full of work and amazingly full of worry, but the work dispelled the worry. The fact of the chain incident being described had brought to a head the rankling jealousy of one or two of Charlie Mudd's friends. One of these had, during Geoffrey's absence, contributed Geoffrey's Art notes to the Syndicate, and did not like having to give it up on his return ; and they ventured to reckon upon the absence of local editors, to call a meeting in the neighbouring town to consider Mr Lowther's lack of professional etiquette in taking up work in this fashion, and passed a vote of censure upon him. But at a later meeting in Greyborough, when some of the chiefs were present, this was rescinded, as he had a perfect right to take up work he had actually originated.

All this caused a mass of the most worrying correspondence, but amidst it all came the pleasant commission, to go across to Berlin to write upon an International Art Exhibition for one of the principal Art Reviews, and a famous literary weekly.

It was, save the *Times*, the top of the tree in

literary journalistic work. He felt compelled to at once rush away to tell his one staunch friend, John Hawthorne. And did not Fraulein Jordan know Berlin! He would meet the Kaiser and the Dowager-Empress, who was so great a lover of art, for they were to open the Exhibition in person, and the personality of both monarchs interested him.

The matter was settled on a Friday, so on Saturday, a glorious summer afternoon, he was ascending the hill at Netherleigh, from whence he looked out over the tawny western sea. All Nature was glorious and beautiful, in keeping with the warmth and glow within him at the prospect before him. Figures and bills, costs and percentages, bad debts and worries, even the continual nagging of local reporters, all were thrown aside in the beauty around him, and in the satisfaction at his success.

He climbed a gate, and, perched upon the flat-topped post, reviewed the situation. Surely if he could do such work he could throw up this double character life and have his mind and his time free for nothing but the work he loved; for writing was ousting painting from its first place in his mind. He had lately had some correspondence with a literary knight famous for his efforts to help authors, but he was scarcely an author, only a journalist; yet he felt the famous man would advise him, and it would be an enjoyment to have met and talked with such a man. So he determined, when *en route* for Berlin, to get an interview with him and ask for that advice.

Then came another thought of his future. He had seen nothing of Miss Maitland lately, and, moreover, rumour had for a while been silent about her. Neither

of the talked-of sales had yet taken place, but her calls to look at the pictures on view had ceased. He missed her sympathetic chat, but could not, would not make a move to induce a meeting, and yet from her own words he knew she—there was one word he would not use even in his mind, so that word changed into—respected him; ay, far more than the wealthy Habgood. If he could leave Greyborough, cut all connection with the place, could he not then speak out? Surely his origin was better than Henry Habgood's, whose father was a sailor, and whose mother had kept a little back public-house; but he had money and the position money buys, and Greyborough could forget origin when money was attained, but remembered it relentlessly where money was not.

He determined to state the whole facts, and act upon the advice of Sir William Broughton, the novelist, although inwardly he still had doubts as to a steady income from writing. Oh, that he was free! Then he crushed back the selfish, ay, cruel thought, and started onward to the home of John Hawthorne.

Before he reached the gate he was greeted with the children's voices and a rush to take his hand. He found all out on the lawn, and on a shady seat were the Rev. Nicholas Dawne and Fraulein Jordan.

He felt rather annoyed at the sight, for he wanted a chat *à deux* with Fraulein; but Mrs Hawthorne came forward and heartily welcomed him, said her husband was detained in Greyborough and would soon now be back.

The chat was general on the weather, and the

view, on the names of the vessels passing up, but Mr Dawne remained glued to his seat, and Hilda Jordan beside him; until at last Geoffrey could hold in his news no longer, but said in German to her,—

'Ich gehe nach Berlin!'*

'Was!' she exclaimed, 'nach Berlin? Nicht für den *Times?*'†

She started from her seat and came across to him, and began to ask questions in German so hurriedly that the Rev. Nicholas saw he too must rise. So he went to Mrs Hawthorne and said he must be going; and crossing to Fraulein he said,—

'We shall see you at church to-morrow.' Then Geoffrey overheard, in low tones, the words, 'four times,' and the young girl walked with him down to the gate.

'What did the words "four times" mean?' thought Geoffrey. 'They could not surely go to church four times.' But *his* thoughts were changed by the cheery voice of Mr Hawthorne, at the gate, saying,—

'What! going, Mr Dawne? Can't the wife find you a cup of tea?' Then the young girl's voice exclaimed,—

'Oh, Mr Lowther is on the lawn.'

'Is he? Glad to hear it. Then you won't stay? Come, Fraulein, run in and get a cup of tea. Has Lowther walked down? Ah, here he is!' and he shook hands heartily as they met, saying, 'Well, brought me some good news of yourself, I hope,' and he led the way to the garden chair. Geoffrey told him of the good news, for Mrs Haw-

* I go to Berlin.

† What, not for the *Times?*

thorne had gone into the house, the children with her, and so Geoffrey was able also to speak freely upon the idea of giving up his position, or at least of taking Sir William's advice.

'Well,' said John Hawthorne, 'hear his advice; but I say, still hold on to a certainty. But tell me what he says to you. Ha, here comes some tea! We dine at six-thirty in time to see the sun set; I never miss that when I'm down here. You will stay, there is a late train.'

'And what does the little curate want, Fraulein? Is he going to make a nun of you?'

'Fraulein is getting quite a devotee. Goes to early communion.'

The colour suffused her cheeks at the words as she arranged the tea-cups on a little rustic table, a maid appearing with the tea.

'These summer mornings are so lovely, it is good to get up early,' she said explanatorily.

'Four times,' thought Geoffrey, watching her. He did not know why, but there was a sense of annoyance to him about these whispered words; they seemed to irritate him, and he must find out what they meant.

'You have heard of Mr Lowther's interesting task, wife?' asked Mr Hawthorne as Mrs Hawthorne reappeared on the lawn.

'Fraulein has told me of it, she is delighted. You are to see her Berlin.'

'I shall enjoy it because you wish me to,' he said gallantly, looking across to the young girl, who was standing pouring out the tea.

'Oh, the pictures! the Munich! the Dusseldorf!

You must stop at Dusseldorf and see the pictures. And Leipsic—go to Leipsic.'

'But it all has to be done in a week. I shall have no time; the Exhibition and travelling will take all the time.'

'Oh, stay longer,' ejaculated Hilda.

'Yes, cannot you stay longer?' asked Mrs Hawthorne.

'No,' interrupted Mr Hawthorne. 'Mr Lowther is right; his people have again given him time because this is on Art matter and useful to them, but—'

'Why don't you give up that wretched picture shop?' asked Fraulein.

'Don't tempt him, he is tempted enough already.'

'Indeed I am,' said Geoffrey.

'Oh, I would!' exclaimed Hilda; but Mrs Hawthorne's warning 'Fraulein!' stayed her blunt words. Then she added: 'You stay and chat with Mr Lowther—he will be glad of some practice with his German—whilst Mr Hawthorne has a change. Come, you are dusty and tired, Fraulein will see Mr Lowther does not run away,' and into the house the genial couple went, and Fraulein at once dived into German with a dozen questions; but ere Geoffrey could answer all, Dorothy and Bobby appeared on the lawn, Bobby exclaiming, 'Is Mr Dawne gone? He sends Fraulein such lovely books.'

'Ruhig!' exclaimed Fraulein, but Bobby's tongue got out explosively, 'and such a lot of notes.'

'And directs his own envelopes,' chimed in Dorothy; 'I saw one. And brings us lovely sweets.'

Fraulein's cheeks were ruby hued when she stopped the youngsters with, 'Children, do not

exaggerate, and run in the fields; I will come for you soon. Mr Lowther wants to talk of Berlin. Now run away.'

'Was this lively, blunt, insouciant young girl to be captured by this would-be ascetic priest?' thought Geoffrey? Her whole nature would be imprisoned. And again those words, 'four times,' and the low-toned voice urged him to find out the meaning of all this; so adopting his journalistic tactics for getting information, he led away from the subject back to Berlin and its Academy, of the men he might meet—Carl Becker and Anton von Werner, the veteran Menzel; his mind was joyous as Fraulein told him of their work, that he already knew by engravings. Then he led on to the life in the capital and amusements. 'And on Sundays,' he said, 'you do not go to early communion, I expect, or at least not to church much after.'

'In the afternoon there are Landpartien, picnics as you call them.'

'No church! But here you do not go three times besides the early service, do you?'

'Oh, there is a children's service sometimes in the afternoon, and I take the children.'

'And there is one to-morrow?' said Geoffrey. He knew now what 'four times' meant. This curate was serious, then. Surely her jovial laughing face ought never to be linked with ascetism, leading probably to hypocrisy; he revolted at the idea, and if Mr Dawne's idea of celibacy were truly reported, what meant this dalliance with a pretty, plump-cheeked girl?

'Mr Dawne is a great worker,' he continued.

'He never gives himself any rest. He studies half the night, I believe.'

'And works in the parish?'

'On from morning till night, and helps in other parishes, and will not take rest, though he looks so ill.'

'Ah, pity plays its part here,' thought Geoffrey; 'the pale face and wearied look appeal to the jolly, healthy vivacity—the rule of akinship of contrasts.'

'Mr Dawne should marry and get a helper,' he said boldly.

'Oh, he will never marry. He thinks a priest should give himself wholly to his work—be absorbed in, and wholly subdued to, the spiritual.'

'But he finds time to come here and send presents,' thought Geoffrey, and seeing she had no objection to the talk, he continued: 'You think he does good, then?'

'Oh, yes, he is so kind to the poor people.'

'Rather leading them back into mediæval superstition.'

'Oh, but poor people want superstition; they want charms, and relics, and all that sort of thing.'

'I know society people want charms, and palmistry and all that mediæval rubbish, but I hoped our poor folk were too sturdily sensible. You have not been reading Goethe or Jean Paul lately. I suppose Mr Dawne does not send you German books? Bobby let slip he sent you books.'

'Those children are ridiculous! He sent me a really lovely little Thomas à Kempis.'

'Marked,' said Geoffrey, furtively.

'How did you know?'

'Oh, journalism teaches us to keep our eyes open ; and the English Catholic's *Vade Mecum?*'

'How *did* you know he sent me that?'

'Journalism. You see I am getting so much work I have my correspondents, and they send me information.'

'Rubbish! You guessed it,' and the bit of badinage had brought back her old self, saucy, laughing, daring.

'You must not set them to spy on me, though,' she added, 'or I shall be cross with you.' He knew not what impelled him, but he said solemnly,—

'I would bear that to save you from evil.' She opened her blue eyes widely and looked him fully in the face, and then a shiver went over her and she said, 'Mr Lowther, you quite make me shudder ; oh, don't be so solemn, you are too solid! Come, I must run down for the children. Will you come? You will have time before dinner.' And away she went, he following her out through the gate, across the road into the fields, she swinging her hat in the air, at last starting into a run, he catching her, and taking her hand they raced together to the headlands, boy and girl again after their serious talk.

They found the rest of the children on the beach, building castles with sand and stones, to be washed down by the incoming tide.

'Ah,' said Fraulein, as they stood on the high bank watching them, 'so bauen wir in die Welle des Meer's, die Welle verraucht, und hin ist unser Pallast.'* It was the Teutonic feeling of sad thought swiftly suc-

* So we build in the waves of the sea, the waves pass on, and our palace is gone.

ceeding gaiety, but gaiety quickly returned, for she said,—

'Is not this sea air glorious? Oh, one breathes here.' And she opened her mouth and took a deep long gulp of the wind from the incoming tide.

'Not much of the cloister about this, Fraulein,' he could not help saying.

'Oh, bother Mr Dawne!'

'I did not speak of him,' was the retort.

And down she rushed on the beach, got her charges together, and away up the fields they trotted, for, she exclaimed, 'I'm to dine with papa to-night and you children will make me late.'

Mr Hawthorne appeared in his morning coat in the dining-room to put Geoffrey at his ease, and the chat was soon bright and vivacious—travel and books, pictures and politics—and Geoffrey could now join in the first topic; the second and third he had always loved, and the fourth his journalism was forcing him to notice, and John Hawthorne was chairman of a Conservative Committee. It was not though until the dessert was on the table that he suddenly exclaimed,—

'There was a startling bit of news as I left Greyborough. Herbert, the Liberal member, was seized with a fit this morning and is hardly likely to recover.'

'Who will be member?' asked Mrs Hawthorne. 'Your party will not contest the seat.'

'Habgood.'

'What! the little Mayor?' asked Fraulein.

'Yes, the little Mayor. He has been nursing the constituency and feeding the hungry wire-pullers

for a long time, and this sudden death—if it is death—pitchforks him into the seat.'

'What a disgrace for Greyborough!' said Mrs Hawthorne. 'Surely the day is gone for illiteracy to rule.'

'What a subject for an article,' thought Geoffrey. 'Civic honours and illiteracy: its effect,' and then the thought came, 'I'll write it.' And immediately the words were seething in his mind, and he was so silent that at last Mrs Hawthorne said,—

'Does this affect you, Mr Lowther?'

'No, hardly,' he answered. He did not see this event was a light tool in the hand of the Great Moulder of our lives, just taken up to set a design on his life, and through him upon the lives of thousands.

'Will he speak in your great Parliament?'

'High 'ope not,' said Mr Hawthorne, sarcastically. 'He will quickly find his level there, and that a very low one.'

'The Gallery men will have to stick in "laughter" pretty frequently if he does,' said Geoffrey.

Then the subject dropped and his Berlin journey was brought up, and the scorn and disgust that were bubbling up into strong words for his article gave place to quiet pleasure at Fraulein Jordan's hints at what he was to see on this journey, and ere the sun had sunk beyond the now golden and ruddy flaming western sea, they were all out on the lawn watching his orange flaming orb rest on the horizon, then quickly dive beneath the waters; and Geoffrey had to say good-bye to these good friends with whom he had intellectual talk and real friendship.

When he got into Greyborough he found the newsboys yelling, 'Spesh'll dishon! Death o' Mister 'Erbert! Hextra spesh'll!' He got a *Gazette*, and in small type, after the death news, was a note, saying, probably Mr Henry Habgood, our worthy chief magistrate, would be invited to contest the seat, followed by a fulsome eulogy of his services to the citizens. Not a word, thought Geoffrey, of the degradation to any city to have such a man as 'representative,' and he quickened his speed to his home; but in passing 'The Nine's' Club he was stopped by a littleknot of men at the door, the tallest being Donald Bain, two or three junior reporters, Charlie Mudd and an actor or two, and one of the older reporters, who was not generally with Charlie's set.

'Heard the news, Lowther?' he called out, and Geoffrey could but stop.

'What—of Mr Herbert's death?'

'No, that old Habgood's to be knighted; wire just in.'

'It's not in the Special,' said Lowther.

'No, too late, going to keep for Monday, but the clubs have got it. Private wire they sent to the head of Habgood's party.'

'Come in and have a drink, Lowther,' said Donald.

'Drink old Habgood's health,' said Charlie. 'Why, he is your patron, Lowther; bought one of those pretty pictures of yours, I remember. Why, you ought to stand drinks round.'

'Charlie draws 'em in,' said one of the juniors. But he did not draw his free drink this time, for Geoffrey saw Donald had already had more than

needful, and he wanted to get away to his article. This news intensified the fire that had been kindled. He wanted to speak with his pen, so he said, 'Really can't, have to write a lot to-night, must do it, and it's past ten now.'

'You work too much,' said the older reporter.

'When do you start for Berlin?'

'This day week.'

'Then you will be out of this excitement, on pleasanter work.'

'Thank God!' said Geoffrey.

'Now, Lowther, don't swear, but come and have a drink. You shall now,' and Donald took him by the arm.

'Yes, come and have a drink, good old Donald,' said a woman's voice, and a woman's arm slipped into Donald's, whilst another woman captured another of the group. Donald still held on to Geoffrey, but he shook himself loose with the words,—

'No, I can't, and you don't want any more,' and he was away.

'Too damned proud, blast him! Here, come, I'll stand. The stingy beggaw!' The last words were in his swell character voice, the oaths in his natural voice, and part of the group with the women went away, but not into the club.

Geoffrey hurried on, found all had gone to rest in his little home, and he was soon writing away on 'Civic honours and illiteracy: its effects.'

He started with all that makes life great and glorious, all that is remembered as nations grow and wane—Bravery, Honour, Art, Literature, and in these

latter days, above all, Science, that transforms the world. Who, he asked, are the men who are remembered in our cities? and he thought of Greyborough as he wrote. Not the rich, who climb into local fame by strong, keen hardness, and a piling up of wealth, with a harsh disregard of all that makes life noble. The fame of these men is evanescent as a smoke whiff; it ascends a yard or two in the air, your eye leaves it for a second, you look for it; it is gone. The men who make cities and towns, ay, and villages famous, are the mighty men of Science and of Literature and Art. To these men we now build monuments, in the cities from whence our forefathers kicked them out. Are not we copying our forefathers in placing in honour seats, men who will be utterly forgotten in the next generation? We prove to our youth that learning is nought; for to-day, after generations of School Boards, we choose as our chief magistrates illiterate boors—men with brains only in the lowest cells, the money-making cells. Sometimes cities are so blinded with gold dust that they send such men to Parliament, and, alas, how frequently are they knighted! Men who have wasted their lives in money-making, who know absolutely nothing of real greatness, whose tongues degrade the English language when they speak. Citizens hear this great crime, laugh at this ignorance, and straightway go and place these men in the highest places, that their children may say, 'So, to gain honour here, be illiterate, be a boor. Noble qualities avail nothing! Learning is absolutely ignored. Science and Art? We know it not. Money! gold! we worship and set it up on high, and humble

ourselves low before it ; for we set the possessors of it, men we would not know in our private life, to be our chief magistrates, our representatives, our "knights."'

Then he worked out shortly the effect upon life in our cities, upon life in England, if worth and attainments and nobility of character alone were recognised. What an impetus to learning, to invention, to development ; for every child would see in his own town that ignorance even with riches was scouted ; that dogged boorishness was ignored ; and that the great ones of the earth, the men whose names would be in the mouths of our descendants, were the men whom to-day we honour.

The city clocks boomed out midnight as he finished the article, and he looked up from his open window to the heavens above ; all was calm, and in the purple summer dome the stars shone out clearly, and as the low boom of a famous old church bell died away, all was silence and peace. He thought of his journey that day week, full of thankfulness and hope, for he had tried to do some little good to the world he lived in.

CHAPTER VII

A GLEAM OF JOY

THE local news on Monday morning gave the gossips of Greyborough matter enough to delay their arrival at their business offices, and, when they did get there, excuse enough to quickly say to the clerks, 'I shall be out for a short time,' that on Exchange or in the 'Clubs' they might chat over Herbert's death and Habgood's luck. Then, in the afternoon before they left the city, there was an article in the *Whitehall* that made the *quidnuncs* talk again.

'Queer!' said one portly, waddling merchant, who dealt in 'forwards' and was called a corn merchant, 'very queer that article should come out to-day.'

'A pretty hard knock at Liverpool,' said a short, keen-eyed, shipping agent.

'Well, Habgood's all very well, but tell me what he's done after all?' asked another of the group.

'Oh, you're in the same trade. Habgood's about as 'cute as they make 'em.'

'But what has he done?'

'Done! Made money. What we are all trying to do, and some of us can't,' was the somewhat slipshod reply.

Meanwhile the writer of the article, that the merchants would certainly not have discussed if they

had known by whom it was written, was deep in work—figures, accounts; preparing advertisements, and getting everything straight for his week's absence. He managed to get some works from the library on Modern European Art, intending to get notes of the lives of some of the artists whose pictures he would soon be studying. He already knew much of their work from reproductions. He had a stiff week before him, but the time flew on the fleetest wings. No moment was free until far into the night; and he heard nothing of the talk about his article, though he saw it evoked a correspondence in the *Whitehall.*

Friday arrived without serious interruption, but in the afternoon, just as he was working at high pressure to clear up matters, the head of the firm came to him, holding a note in his hand.

'Look here, Mr Lowther. Here is an important matter, you had better go at once. Mrs Fortescue is selling her portfolios of sketches and prints, and wants us to offer for them. They are an old family, there are probably some of Bartolozzi's and other valuable prints. She says you are to call, if possible. Don't make an offer, of course I will arrange that; but tell us what she has. You can finish up when you come back.'

'That means midnight,' thought Geoffrey, 'and putting off my talk with Sir William,' but then he thought of the week's freedom ahead, so away he hurried. He had to pass the house where the Maitlands still lived. Would he meet her? Why did his thoughts fly at once to this? All thinking of his journey seemed impossible, his mind refused

to dwell but upon Evelyn Maitland's future; and, as though his intense thought had called her from her home, as he drew near the avenue where she lived, he saw her come out of the gate and walk slowly in the direction he was going.

He slackened his speed and thought. Lady Habgood, wife of an M.P., and wealthy; and wretched gnawing discontent and misery. Could he tell her of the future now looming brightly, and so near the dawning to him. And write myself down an ass, be a veritable Dogberry. Does she prefer the wealth and these dearly-bought honours? I will let her act.

He quickened his steps. Evelyn Maitland had reached the end of the avenue, and struck across the open downs in the direction he was going.

He caught nearly up to her. He could see she was lost in deep thought. Her face was full of sadness, almost pain. He hesitated a moment or two watching her, and then, as though she knew he was near, she looked round, and their eyes met fully, as they had never met before.

He raised his hat. She bowed; her glance was hidden by the falling eyelids. He was abreast of her, near her, but she did not look again as he was passing; again he raised his hat, she did not again bow, and Geoffrey passed on, thanking God he had not writ himself down an ass.

On he went; did his work; showed more pleasure at the engravings than compatible with a dealer, and got back to his desk in less than two hours. But it was late ere he turned off the gas and struck for home.

But all his work and his worries were forgotten when, on the following evening, he got into the Continental express at Liverpool Street *en route* for Harwich and the Hook of Holland for Berlin. He chose this route because Mr Hawthorne had told him it was the one under English control, most of the routes out of the south-east of England being foreign ventures.

Fortune favoured him with the company of a most agreeable young companion; a man who had been living in Russia, studying Russian, and who was now journeying to Berlin to study German, and who knew no German, and to whom Geoffrey was useful; and ere the day was over he found he was travelling with Lord K——, the son of one of our most famous diplomats, who, when he learned Geoffrey's mission, was highly interested, and gave him the names of two officials in Berlin who would assist him to gain the *entrée* to places closed to the public.

His Eastern journey gave Geoffrey a leverage in his talks with this budding diplomat, that put him on a level with the Russian traveller; and he learnt much of Russian customs. The talk was mutually interesting, so interesting that he expressed his regret that the day was over when, late at night, they neared Berlin; and to his delight his companion handed him his card, writing upon it his Berlin address, and told him to call ere quitting the capital.

He was soon lost sight of in the rush at the station. Geoffrey took care to follow Fraulein Jordan's directions, got his pass ticket from the

policeman at the exit of the station, and was soon in a droschke driving to the Hotel du Nord Unter den Linden. Yesterday and to-day! He thought, what a change in his life in one day! He laughed over his good fortune as he looked round on the brilliantly-lit street, and felt thankful. It was but the first gleam of fortune in his journalistic work that was to make his 'luck,' as some termed it, almost proverbial; but Geoffrey Lowther did not believe in luck.

The next morning he was out betimes to call on Professor Anton von Werner, at eight o'clock, but he found the Kaiser was before him; and the famous painter was already gone to keep an appointment at the Exhibition with the Kaiser at seven-thirty, so he called on Dr Julius Meyer and on Professor Carl Becker, and, armed with a card countersigned by both, was soon at the Exhibition grounds with the right of the *entrée*, two days before the opening; and Professor Carl Becker had told him that one of the introductions given him by Lord K—— would be of influence with the chief of the police for street passes when the lines were *abgesperrt*.

He was quickly deep in his work amidst the marvels of modern art of all nations. How he thanked God and John Hawthorne for his Eastern journey, and how delighted he was to come into the English courts, and find good work of Burne-Jones and Richmond, Leighton and Crane, and Hook and Shaw with sea pieces that he could now understand.

In seascapes, truly England was pre-eminent, but the power and breadth and daring of the Nor-

wegian, Italian, and even Russian, schools held him spellbound. Hour after hour passed; he was almost alone; none of the critics were there, he had got before them, and it was only when a swimming in his head told him mid-day was long past he went out into the grounds to get a rest and refreshment. Geoffrey Lowther was happy.

For the two days he stuck to his work, and when his articles came out, how short they were compared to all his notes, but he had made his readers feel some of his pleasure, and he kept space for the opening ceremony, and here 'fortune' favoured him in his having a position on the tribune of the Minister of Education, where he could look into the eyes of the Dowager-Empress, and see the tears well into them as, in military, strident tones, the Emperor referred to the work of his dead father for Art.

At the banquet that followed he found he was seated next to the *Times* correspondent, who soon was friendly, and just before him was Professor Carl Becker, his breast covered with stars and orders, and around were all the famous men of Germany. Like a Roman banquet, the feast lasted for many hours, but there was ample opportunity between note-taking for talk, and, in German fashion, moving about, and his *Times* friend introduced him to some of the Berlin men. The time passed right merrily, but he got away before the finish to get his wire for the *Whitehall* off, and the weekly articles in the post.

He had three days left to make more friends in Berlin, and to take in Amsterdam and Rotterdam on his return, to at least glance at the Rembrandts and

Dutch masters, and on the following Monday, in early morning, he was again in London.

Could he be successful in seeing Sir William Broughton, and yet keep his word to his employers to be again at work on the Monday? He took a train at once to Hampstead, found the worthy knight was at home, and writing on his card the mission he had just returned from, begged for a few minutes of Sir William's time, and quickly he was seated in a library with the famous author before him, who saluted him with the words,—

'I saw your article in the *Whitehall*. You made me long to be off.'

'Did I?' said Geoffrey. 'I did not know I had succeeded.'

'Well! Why do you wish to see me?'

'Your reputation for helping poor authors, Sir William.'

'But you are not a poor author if you do this work.'

'Ah, that is just it,' said Geoffrey; 'but Jubilee Art Exhibitions are not weekly,' and he put his case before him, ending with, 'What is your advice? I may say my best, in fact, my only friend in Greyborough told me to follow your advice.'

'Your friend lays a great responsibility on my shoulders.'

'But he believes in your judgment.'

'H'm. You can write. But journalism like yours is risky authorship. Have you written a book?'

'No,' he said, but the question seemed to tell him he could write one.

'Well, as you come to me, I should say hold on to a certainty. For the sake of others you cannot, I can see, risk too much. I said journalism is risky, look at this; just come, a young writer. You know his name. Had engagements on weekly illustrated; had just got the editorship of a monthly, thought he was in clover; the weekly changes editors and he has to go, and the monthly is sold to a company who have their own men. No, for those dependent on you, I cannot say give up your situation, especially remembering how Richard Jeffries, who was journalist and author, died; how poor, R. A. Proctor was, and that Matthew Arnold left but a £1000 to his widow. But I like your work, and others will like it. At present, stick to your certainty. You seem to be able to get time?'

'Yes, in Art matters,' interrupted Geoffrey.

'Well, get what you can and work. If you were a football reporter now, there is a permanency, unless an extra slangy young man comes along, but for Art or artistic writing—no, you must wait. But why not get a foreign correspondent's berth? You could try for that. Now stay and have a bit of lunch with me, and tell me about Berlin and the Kaiser.'

How tempting this was! but to stay would be to break his word with the firm, and so he told Sir William.

'Well, then, good-bye,' said the author. 'I shall meet you again, I'm sure, and all success to you.'

That afternoon Geoffrey was back in Greyborough picking up the threads of back work, very few there knowing he had been absent, and none caring to

know. What was a foreign Art Exhibition to a town that had no Art Gallery? But they were all, he found, excited over Sir Henry Habgood, M.P., and his forthcoming marriage with Miss Evelyn Maitland.

CHAPTER VIII

STEERING AND DRIFTING

GEOFFREY was a little surprised at the total absence of any interest manifested by everyone in Greyborough on his Berlin journey. No reference had been made in the local *Gazette* or other journals to his articles, and when he mentioned the incident the subject was immediately strangled, as though it ought not to be talked about. But the information he had gleaned enabled him so to talk of a couple of Belgian genre pictures they had, that he effected a sale which his employers told him made up for the time they had given him; a little fact that comforted him, for it promised time granted for any other Art journey.

He would not have been surprised at the absence of any comment on his work had he known of the informal little meeting that had taken place in the reporters' room of one of the journals of Charlie's chums, as the members of the little group who admiringly looked up to the writer of 'Charlie's Chatter' were dubbed.

They had failed in getting Geoffrey censured, but they intended to stop his little game. 'Anyway,' said Charlie, 'there's no word about his stuff going in the *Gazette*.'

'But suppose the boss writes something?' said a junior.

'Can't the sub. crowd it out? Look here, you can keep any man's name out if you like; work it with the sub. Suppose he gives a lecture, put in what the chairman says and leave out the lecture; suppose he takes the chair, put in the lecture and leave out the chairman's speech: want of space, don't you twig? If he takes the chair at a meeting make a mistake, and put in someone else or spell the name wrong.'

'Some editors wouldn't stand that.'

'Yes, dear boy, but we ain't in that gallery, we can work it. Even if the boss wrote it himself the sub. would crowd it out. Folks must be civil if they want a lift from me.'

'And stand drinks round, eh, Charlie?'

'Oh, well a small bottle of Bollinger about 11 a.m. suits me. Look here,' he said suddenly, 'let's call a meeting. You all be there, and pass a vote he is only to rank as junior associate.'

'But you'll have to put that on the call, and the chiefs might turn up.'

'Call the meeting in one of the sub towns; they won't take the trouble to go there. He won't like that, and will clear out.'

'But what excuse? What reason can you give?' asked another.

'Why, that he is not regularly on any paper.'

'But he is now,' chimed in a third.

'No, he isn't; for we wrote to all his papers, and two didn't answer, and the other said, "Send us along another man that can write as well."'

There was a general laugh at this. 'That proves nothing,' said one.

'Yes, it does,' said Charlie. 'If he'd been on the staff they'd have told us so, and be damned for our impertinence. Anyway, dear boys, that's the way we can work it; are you game?'

'If you can work it, all right.'

'Good, wait a bit and you'll see.'

'Well, we don't want his telling the whole bally truth about things like that chain business, and spoiling our pitch,' said a smartly-dressed, black-moustached young man, who added, 'But I must be off,' and his departure broke up the little meeting.

'That chain' business had also stirred up the rancour of the now Sir Henry Habgood; and a call he made upon the chief editor of the *Greyborough Gazette*, to demand of him if it was one of his reporters who had written it, led to his learning that it was that young picture dealer's assistant of whom Miss Maitland had spoken so highly. He remembered she had told him he was clever at writing as well as painting.

'I must forbid her going there,' he said to himself as he entered his brougham. 'The impudence of such a man! Evelyn seemed much taken with him too.' And the jealousies of the old man bridegroom began to swell in his breast.

'Curse the fellow! None of the reporters ever dared print what I said. They have always made it all right; and now this scoundrel tells this tale; and just at the most important moment of my life. I must stop his writing.' His knighthood and success in his latter-day wooing made him forget 'the fellow' for the time; but the true bit of description rankled con-

tinuously. He dreaded lest his manipulation of the event to his own ends should come out.

There was to be a great day at Netherleigh in the week following Geoffrey's return ; a tennis tournament, and the prizes were to be given by Miss Evelyn Maitland, 'Whom we shall shortly hail as one most closely interested in the dignity and welfare of the borough,' so ran the local note. 'Dignity!' exclaimed some of the mothers and maidens who had angled fairly for the dignified one, 'fancy old Habgood being dignified!' But Evelyn Maitland was already reaping the harvest of her sowing. All Greyborough was bowing to her publicly and sneering privately, as they knew the bills had been printed for a public sale of even her mother's household effects ; but the sale had been stopped ; and now, instead of being forgotten when invitations were sent out, she was asked everywhere, to insure the presence of Sir Henry and his cheque-book.

It was a lovely scene, the tennis field on the glorious summer's day. Lying amidst uplands rich in foliage, in pastures and corn, and the soft green sward, dotted with bright costumes and startling blazers, made a colour picture full of beauty, full too of soft, delicate scents of summer's growth, and a westerly air off the sea just breathed a refreshing vigour into the atmosphere that quickened the spirits and pulses of the onlookers. It was good to live on such a day, and perhaps only Evelyn Maitland of all those present felt the air too hot, too depressing.

A match was nearing the close, all were interested ; but she was standing with her mother on the outside edge of a group when she heard the voice of Donald

Bain saying, 'Miss Maitland is not interested in this set.'

'Oh, yes, I am,' and, belying her words she turned to him and strolled away on the outside of the broken lines of spectators.

Donald was well dressed; a smart, well-set-up man, his black moustache hiding his sensual lips and half his chin. His face a bit puffy, but to-day fairly clear, showing, for some days at least, he had not been drinking; and as the two walked along on the green turf they looked a handsome couple; she with the strange sadness in her, he with the confident swagger of the handsome man, knowing his power over woman.

He looked down to her face, but her eyes were downcast; and they talked of the tournament, of the chances of certain players, until at last, when they had walked to the end of the field, he suddenly said,—

'I have not had an opportunity before of offering my congratulations.'

'Oh, please don't,' she said.

'You will be a free woman then, with lots of power.'

She looked up in his face. Was he insulting her? But his eyes were turned from her.

'I can imagine your success in London Society. Greyborough deserves to lose you. May I call upon you in town?'

'Of course you may. I shall be always glad to see you.'

'How I shall miss you in our audiences! Do you know, Miss Maitland, ofttimes your face in the stalls has positively inspired me.'

'Oh, you must find someone else now to inspire you.'

'Someone with your face! That is impossible!'

'Happy man'—he paused and she looked up at him —'Sir Henry,' he added slowly, and he looked her full in the eyes. Some applause clattered out over the field. 'Why, there he is!' he said, and the deep flush on her face turned to a bluish pink as she looked across to the pavilion and saw walking towards it her affianced husband, his little podgy figure jerking along, tightly buttoned up in a frock-coat, and beneath an immaculate silk hat.

She felt faint, and against her wish took Donald's arm, saying, 'Let us go across.'

'Isn't it pleasant here in the quiet?' he asked.

'I prefer it,' she stammered unwittingly, 'yes, but I must go,' and with a pressure on his arm that made a chuckling pleasure come into his mind she led him back to the circle of the spectators; but Sir Henry had not gone to the pavilion, and saw them and turned towards them.

'Ah, Sir Henry! We know who you are looking for.'

Sir Henry took no notice of his words, but exclaimed, 'Why, Hevelyn! You look quite faint.'

'I am, I think the sun affected me; I had to take Mr Bain's arm. Thank you, Mr Bain,' she said as she bowed to him, and then turned to her lover.

How she shuddered at the contrast between the two men! The one tall, stalwart in his manhood, the other redolent of his moneyhood. She knew not that the manhood was cancered with drink and vice; her womanhood saw but the handsome man and—his contrast.

'You had better come to the pavilion,' said Sir Henry, offering his arm.

'Yes, I think so,' she said, and took the arm, but she did not lean on it.

Donald watched the couple skirt the crowd and make their way to the pavilion. Turning, he said to himself, 'How she leant on my arm! I could have had her. Eh! but there's noo nae siller. Time enough yet,' and he mixed in the crowd and stood looking at the game. He often dropped into his old Scotch way of speaking when alone, but very, very rarely let it master his assumed stage swell accent that he had made his distinction. Suddenly he espied the Hawthornes' group not far off, and Hilda Jordan was too pretty a girl for him to miss the chance of a talk if he could get one. So he worked his way round to get near them, and just as he reached them a set was finished, and Mr and Mrs Hawthorne left the circle with some friends, leaving Hilda alone; so Donald seized the opportunity, and, raising his hat, said, 'And is Miss Jordan enjoying the game?'

He knew she laughed at his German pronunciation, so did not venture even on Fraulein.

'Oh, it's over, I think.'

'No, there is yet one game to be played.'

'I'm tired of watching. Shall we stroll round?'

'Too delighted,' said Donald, thinking to himself these foreign girls are jolly free.

'But we must not miss the prize-giving; Mr Habgood is always so amusing.'

'He would not like to hear you say so.'

'Oh, but he knows it, and laughs at the crowd who applaud. I'm sure he does.'

'Do you think so?'

'Yes, everyone knows themselves, it is the crowd who are gulled.'

'Willingly,' said Donald.

'Why, don't you even know yourself?' And she looked archly up into his face.

'Eh, but I do,' he said.

'But you do act really, capitally. I do so like to see you.'

'One can't be always acting,' said Donald.

'No? Well, it must be tiring. Especially when one has so many friends as you have, Mr Bain.'

'Friends—I've no friends, just acquaintances.' Her touchstone power had smashed his mask; the man was himself.

'Oh, but you do know so many people.'

'Know! I ken none would ask me to their house for a bit friendly chat. Eh, it's the actor they want, and no Donald Bain, and not the actor in their homes.'

'But I hear so many say how clever you are.'

They were some distance now from the crowd, and he suddenly stopped and faced her, a fierce look she had never seen before on his face. 'What's in you that you make me speak like this? But it's true. I have no real friends; pals! heaps! And not one worth that,' and he clicked finger and thumb. 'It's a rotten world, Miss Jordan.' The fierce look went and the fixed Society smile came back to his face.

'Oh, no, it's a lovely world—a beautiful world! Look round. We have a saying, "How glorious is God's earth, and good to be a man upon it," and you are a man.'

'You'd say beast if you knew me,' thought Donald

but her spell was over and he could command his words again; but he had let her see into the real loneliness of his life. Good for her he let her see no deeper; he had touched her pity. There was a man beneath that flashy veneer, though a pitiably weak one.

'Why,' he said, after a pause, 'we are getting quite serious.' A round of applause broke on the still air as he spoke. 'Ah, it's over! Shall we go and see the prizes given?' He was afraid of this young girl.

'Oh, it will be too pitiable to see that poor Miss Maitland,' said Hilda. 'It's too horrible!'

'She does not think so.'

'She does; look into her eyes.'

'She won't let us all do that. Just now you said Sir Henry would be funny.'

'Ah! I had forgotten Miss Maitland.'

'I think we ought to go back,' he said. He wanted to be in the foreground applauding. He remembered that pressure on his arm, and so they rejoined the groups before the pavilion, but Hilda left him to seek for Mrs Hawthorne.

That night when Donald got back to Greyborough he went straight to his 'diggings,' as he called his rooms, the words of that young girl still echoing in his ears. He lit no light; the soft light of a summer's night came in at the open window, and he did a very rare thing—he sat and thought. 'What's to be a tag o' the play? Bad for me, damned bad. Don't see any way out of it; everything's pretty well played out—unless I can make a *coup* on a race, or raise money on a bill of lading. But where's the bill?' He was getting hopelessly involved. On all sides he

was being pressed. The funds of 'The Nine's' Club were gone and a lot of accounts not paid.

He had not revelled in wine, women and song—three things that are glorious adjuncts to a man's life, enjoyed judiciously—but in whisky, wenches and shout—three adjuncts that drag a man down to miserable degradation in body, mind and soul. That bill of lading seemed a chance of help for a time, but the time was so short nowadays. How about a sailing ship from 'Frisco?—that would give time—or Japan. And by that time Evelyn Maitland would be Lady Habgood—wealthy; and the old fool will—let her have money. How she leant on my arm! And he thought he saw a way out of the meshes closing in upon him.

Then he did a curious thing—walked across to one of those old-fashioned bureaux with a sloping lid, unlocked it, and taking from a pigeon-hole a locked-up diary, opened it, and wrote in jerky phrases the incidents of the day:—

'Went Netherleigh. Tennis. Talk. E. M. gone on me. Back. Think out budget deficit—ways and means. Nine's subs nearly played out. Bill lading. E. M. Old fool find cash. Good.' And so anyone who might get a look into this book could, with a key to the jerky phrases, read into his inmost thoughts; but he did not intend anyone should read his words.

His presence on the tennis-field had seriously upset the calm of Sir Henry Habgood. To see his affianced bride positively leaning on this play-acting fellow's arm! He had to talk to the man when he came to ask for his patronage at the theatre; he always liked to be seen in the mayor's box on the

crowded amateur nights, the audience was so genial, and gave him such a round of applause ; but he must tell Evelyn she really must be more circumspect. But no chance was given him by Evelyn that day, and he had to get back early to be present at a meeting of the Women's Suffrage Association. They had not been able to tackle him before his election, all was so sudden ; but there were rumours of dissolution, and so they had invited him to be present at their annual meeting this evening, and he went in no genial mood. But he donned his most suave and unctuous manner, chatted with the most vigorous lean kine of womanhood and prettiest of persuasive ones, made a capital speech on the intellect of women, and at the end he went and sat down, satisfied he had put them off without positively promising anything ; but an energetic, white-tied committee man came forward in the front of the room, and said in a clear voice,—

'Then, Sir Henry, we will ask you a plain question:—Are you wholly in favour of Woman's Suffrage?'

Sir Henry rose from his seat, walked slowly forward to the platform rail, placed his left hand on it and his right within his dress waistcoat. There was an intense silence.

'High ham.'

The audience rose, cheered, laughed, rattled chairs and stamped with a tempest of applause. Never before had he received such an outburst from platform and hall ; he bowed and bowed, and would have somewhat qualified his emphatic words, but it was no good. On went the rounds of applause. He

turned round to the platform, all the faces were broad with smiles, and again hands were clapped vigorously ; and so he went to his seat, feeling certain he had done it this time and carried the whole audience with him, and he had. He saw he had by the eulogistic report in the *Gazette* next morning.

CHAPTER IX

'MALE AND FEMALE CREATED HE THEM'

It was a matter of months ere Greyborough could settle down into its ordinary, local legislation topics after the excitement of this summer, the wedding of Sir Henry, our Mayor and M.P., adding material for gossip that quite occupied all tongues, to the exclusion of questions that the community had debated upon for years. They did not act; if they had, the springboards for leaping into public offices would have been destroyed.

The summer months seemed to have evaporated for Geoffrey Lowther, and yet they had left a residue of real result from his work; many an invitation now came from town for private views, literary coteries and receptions. The light mornings and long evenings had given him time to advance with the brush, and several visits to London had given him material and suggestions for articles, and had given him what was very pleasant—friends who knew him for his work. He could no longer say John Hawthorne was his sole intellectual friend; he had a dozen who invited him to their homes—men to whom he looked up with respect for their work, their power over mankind. But this made him reverence his good friend at Netherleigh the more, and now he could in some fashion return

his friendship by his chat on men whom Greyborough heard of but knew not, and many an evening he spent in the seaside home, once a week reading German or French plays, with Hilda Jordan as a coach.

They did not see much now of the Rev. Josiah Cubberley. Geoffrey noticed he did not stop and chat as before. 'Thinks me a reprobate, I suppose,' he said once to Mr Hawthorne.

'Oh, he has a call and is going to leave,' was the reply.

But if they did not see much of Dissent the Church was ever with them. It was remarkable how many messages the Rev. Paul Shannon sent by his curate to Mrs Hawthorne, and they took a long time to deliver. The obstinate old vicar did not allow much change in the church, but the curate was paving the way in the parish for a more devout reverence to the priest and the church.

'That girl is getting quite curate bitten,' said Mr Hawthorne one day to Geoffrey as they were strolling over the high upland that looked out over the sea. 'Painfully regular in her church-going, fasting communion, and my wife tells me Mr Dawne sends her marked books; it will be a pity if such an ingenuous girl gets hypocritical.'

'Curates are like most men,' said Geoffrey—'prefer a pretty girl to a plain one.'

'Oh, you can see she is pretty, can you? My wife says you are the most indifferent fellow to pretty girls.'

'Ah!' said Geoffrey, and he stopped short. He thought of one face he had thought beautiful, and said no more.

'You see,' said Mr Hawthorne, 'the thing is this; Dawne's parents are swells and have big intentions for their son. They would not hear of his marrying a governess. He says he agrees with celibacy in the Church, but we know what that game is from old experience; and if he were not a curate, why, we should say he ought to propose to the girl. He would say, of course, it was her spiritual welfare he was seeking to benefit.'

'I see she wears a ring now.'

'Oh, you've twigged that. Yes; and Bobby says there is an N. D. inside it. Do for Nôtre Dame, don't you see?'

'Or Nicholas Dawne,' said Geoffrey.

'Exactly so. And my wife noticed she ungloves her hand in church and displays the ring.'

'Why don't you speak to him?'

'Nothing positively to speak of, unless I spoke of his sermons. I don't often remember texts, but putting this and that together it seems to me Mr Dawne does like a good actor often does—preaches to one in the crowd, and that one is Fraulein.'

'What were the texts, then?'

'Well, one was Jeremiah, but there was precious little lamentation about it—"I have loved thee with an everlasting love;" another was that very pleasant verse, "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper, and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." There is one thing, the sermons had some go in them, but a little too strong if they were preached at one underneath—and that one a pretty woman. The girl seems agitated lately, and my wife was next her at Communion, and when Dawne placed

the Bread in her hands she was trembling violently. I don't like the whole symptoms. She is too good a girl to be fooled by a curate.'

'He deserves a thrashing if he is fooling her,' exclaimed Geoffrey.

'Exactly so, but how prove it? And who is to blame? Did she commence the fooling?'

'She is most freely ingenuous, as you say.'

'Just so, and he may have taken her ingenuousness as advances, and curates are men if weak-minded. Look here, Lowther. This thing is worrying me terribly. Stay down here to-night and come with us to church to-morrow. Dawne will be sure to call in the afternoon, and tell me what you think. I want to talk with someone on this business, and this is such a terrible place for gossip I dare not mention even a suspicion of our thoughts.'

'But,' said Geoffrey.

'Oh, I know, no bag; we can fix you up. I'll send a wire to your people. I'm anxious about that girl, and between us we may come to something.'

'But I can't spy.'

'Hang it, man, it's not spying. I want your eyes to help mine, and I want your advice.'

Geoffrey felt thankful his good friend so trusted him, and so it came about he spent a Sunday in the seaside home, was one of the family party in the old church, the seat being within thirty yards of the curate's reading-desk, and certainly he thought that the curate's eyes looked most frequently into that seat; but he did not care to turn his glance upon Hilda's face, it seemed too much like spying. The vicar read the lessons, and then Mr Dawne sat with

head rested upon his spread-out fingers; but there was space between those fingers through which he could study the congregation.

The curate was to preach, and to the relief of two, and perhaps three in the Hawthornes' pew, the text was not on love; but it was from Ecclesiastes—'Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil,' and a smile went over John Hawthorne's face as he looked at Geoffrey, who thought, 'Hardly going to twist this into a love sermon.' But the development of the sermon was curious. The preacher seemed to be reading the soul of a man who was going about doing wrong, knowing the wrong he was doing. Knowing the evil of it, fighting against it, telling no one, wearing an outward smile to hide the evil.

'All outwardly may seem well,' he urged, 'but none know the awful struggle going on within, the struggle that is wearing him,' and he seemed to plead for pity for such a one. 'He is struggling alone, and none but himself will know if he wins or loses the fight. The powers of evil, the powers of the flesh, are too strong, too overmastering for us,' and he pleaded for sympathy and assistance for even those who did evil.

It seemed sometimes like the remorseful cry of a man, too weak to resist temptation, pleading our nature's weakness as excuse for his crime.

'Well, sir, what did you think of the sermon?' asked Geoffrey when they had got away from the crowd.

'I did not think at first it could be twisted round

into our subject, but it did work round most emphatically. Sort of sorry, but I can't help it.'

'Might it not be general?'

'Did it sound general? Was not the intensity of it personal?'

'It certainly sounded so, but yet—'

'Oh, there is mischief in this, and I must stop it. I would not have that girl harmed. She has been too good to my children. Well, we will see if he resists temptation and stays away this afternoon.'

But almost ere the dessert was cleared from their mid-day dinner the white, thin face of the Rev. Nicholas Dawne was seen slowly coming up the lawn to the verandah; but he was met halfway by Hilda, and the pair strolled up and down the lawn.

The two men stepped out on to the verandah, and the pair went down to the lawn gate, and ere long Hilda came back alone, and Mr Hawthorne said, 'Now go down, Lowther, and have a chat with her, and let me know what you think of the matter. I will come down directly.'

A queer task this, thought Geoffrey, but as Hilda was coming up towards the steps he went down, saying, as he stepped on to the lawn, 'Is Mr Dawne gone? We ought to have thanked him for his sermon, he was most impressive;' and he looked straight at Hilda, whose eyes sparkled, and her face was full of vivacity, the little dimples laughing in her cheeks.

'Oh, he is so earnest in all he does,' she said.

'One would almost think he, too, was struggling with a pet sin,' said Geoffrey.

The dimples went and the eyes lost their brightness.

'He thinks so many things are wicked.'

'That you don't?'

'Not I,' said the young girl; back came the dimples. 'He is too solid, poor fellow!'

'Was it pity?' thought Geoffrey. Had her insouciance and touchstone qualities drawn this veneer priest out of his veneer, burst and peeled away the thin coating and shown the young man loving the pleasures of life, hankering after beauty and vivacious girl society, but letting caution for his worldly future, the trammels of the sect in the Church that had enmeshed him, hold him still in the petty pretences of Church work, for his calls, and not outspoken, manly love-making?

Geoffrey felt cross with the man, and he led the way down to the rustic seat, saying, 'Shall we sit down? Mr Hawthorne is coming out directly.'

As they sat down he noticed that her hand was spread out on her knees and the little ring sparkled upon it.

'That is a pretty ring, Fraulein,' he said suddenly. 'May I see it?'

She did not take it off but placed her hand in his.

'May I take it off?' he asked.

'Oh, no, you could not,' she said; and she laughed at him as he held her hand, that was tingling with life, it seemed to him, and he essayed to take off the ring, but she laid her other hand on his, saying, 'No, Mr Lowther, you must not.'

'But I want to see the stone more closely,' he said.

'There then,' and she held up her hand close to his lips.

He almost kissed it, but he did not, but he felt growing savage at the man who, if Mr Hawthorne was right, was fooling this open-hearted morsel of charming humanity; and he could not help saying, 'Does the Rev. Nicholas Dawne take it off?'

'Oh, Mr Lowther,' she exclaimed, 'Mr Dawne is not *frivole*.'

'Did he put it on?' he asked point blank.

'No. I put it there. Really, you have no right,' and she started up and stood before him.

'Do you know Longfellow's "Beware"—the scene occurred in Germany?' he asked.

'What do you mean?' she said.

'Nothing,' answered Geoffrey, 'only sometimes it is not the Maiden who is fooling.'

'Why! I shall think my pupil is getting jealous.' She laughed a rippling little laugh, but out came, running down the lawn, little Midge and leaped up into Hilda's arms, saying, 'Oh, cuddle me up comfie!' and the young girl sat herself down on the seat, and the child snuggled herself into her arms and laid her head cosily upon her bosom, that seemed to heave slowly with motherly tenderness.

Geoffrey sat and looked at the little picture, and wished he could paint, or instantaneously photograph the group vividly in colours, and straightway Mr Dawne was forgotten; he saw only the lawn in the sunshine, the flowers, and green turf and blue sky, and beyond the glinting sea, and near him this young girl palpitating with life, love emanating from her and drawing all things to her. Her presence had

always been pleasant to him, but never before had his eyes been opened to see her as he now saw her.

But Mr and Mrs Hawthorne's advent dissolved the picture, and Fraulein jumped up, saying, 'Won't you sit down, Mrs Hawthorne? We are going for our walk now; come, Midge,' and she ran laughing up the steps.

'Well, Lowther, what do you make of this business?'

Geoffrey paused for a while and then said slowly, 'I don't think you ought to bring me into it, sir.'

'Why not? Why not? An outsider can always see most.'

'I think Mr Lowther is right,' said Mrs Hawthorne, 'we must decide ourselves, John. At least the matter must not go much further; the young girl is under our care and we must see no evil comes to her. But we really must not worry Mr Lowther.'

Mr Hawthorne did not reply, He knew the extreme calm to be obtained in allowing the last word to the ladies, but he felt satisfied in having a male friend to consult on the matter, and Lowther was a man of the world who saw deeply into things.

But here the matter ended, and Geoffrey had the memory of an enjoyable day spent in intellectual society, and in peaceful, pleasant scenes; but there was a something that seemed to annoy him as he walked on through Greyborough that night, and the face of the pale curate seemed to stick in his vision, alternating with that glimpse of womanly beauty making a child happy.

CHAPTER X

THE SECOND RUNG OF THE LADDER

THE winter months rolled on. Lady Habgood was seen but little in Greyborough, and Sir Henry had withdrawn some of his local subscriptions. 'Got all he wants,' said some grumblers; 'It's she's doing it,' said others.

Geoffrey often wondered he did not meet them in town at private views. At artistic or literary gatherings he hardly expected to see them. But one bright day in late winter he had just come out of the Institute's room and crossed over to the Royal Academy side in Piccadilly, when he heard a voice that transfixed him; it was in the old, low-toned voice of Evelyn Maitland, but querulous and worried. 'Oh, do come along,' it repeated; he looked round in the surging crowd, and behind him, near a shop window, was the dumpy little form of Sir Henry, and just ahead, waiting, Evelyn Habgood. He turned his head quickly and made his way through the Burlington Arcade, looked into the Geographical Society's rooms to meet a friend who was making a research in their library, stayed a few minutes, and then passed through Vigo Street and down to the Regent's Circus end of Piccadilly. Here he paused for a moment to cross over, when again he heard the

voice saying in hard tones, 'Oh, *do* let us take a cab and go home.' The bitter accent on the 'home' made him turn round, and close behind him was Lady Habgood and her husband. They had been slowly creeping along Piccadilly since he had before heard her speak. He raised his hat. She bowed, but turned away, and he saw her assist the little man into a hansom and they disappeared.

He went on into the Strand, and was looking into a print shop, when he felt a hand clutch his arm. 'Just the man I wanted to see,' said a voice. 'Come along, the 'bus is waiting,' and willy nilly he was forced into a 'bus that this energetic man had halted whilst he leaped out and collared Geoffrey.

It was the Editor of the *Syndicate*. 'Come to dine with me at the Victoria; I've got Sir Arthur Digby, the Mayor of Capetown's sister, and one or two more. I want you to do the Royal Wedding for us.'

'But—' said Geoffrey.

'No buts; you've got to do it.'

'I mean, I've no dress coat.'

'Oh, hang that! you may have turned up from anywhere. Six-thirty sharp, as going to theatre. Goodbye,' and he had leaped out and left Geoffrey in a 'bus going he did not know where; so he paid his fare and jumped out and stood on the pavement wondering at this astounding fortune.

But he was at the Victoria Hotel, and was introduced to the guests—'our special going to do the Royal Wedding for us'—and was asked to take down Miss Van Wet, a tall, handsome woman wearing a remarkable diamond necklace. Geoffrey felt uncomfortable

in his morning coat with this resplendent dame, but travel talk soon made matters smooth, and she envied him his presence at this royal wedding that was to be attended by half the crowned heads of Europe.

'It is a curious alliance and may cause a European war,' she said. 'Neither Russia nor Turkey will like it.'

Geoffrey learnt from this chat the commission was more important than he expected, and when dinner was over, and the ladies had disappeared, his chief said, in a quick whisper,—

'Had meant to wire you. Lucky you are up. Meet me here at ten-thirty to-morrow.'

When all had driven off to the theatre Geoffrey was free to think. He had better look in at the 'Dogberry' and get all the information he could, and go down to the London office of the *Syndicate* and have a talk with Warrington, the London editor and secretary.

Away to Fleet Street and up a narrow court and a dirty, ill-lit, tumble-down flight of stairs, until out of breath he opened one door of three on a top landing and came upon a half door inside, such as one sees in village shops; he rapped on this, and a voice called 'Come in!' and in he went; and behind the partition was a short, genial-faced man, nearly hidden behind newspapers, slips of proof, and odds and ends.

Geoffrey gave his name.

'Ah,' said the genial one, 'glad to see you, Mr Lowther. You are going to do this wedding for us?' and he dived at once into particulars of amount for wires, all to come here, I edit, keep it down. 'But

we want picturesque, vivid accounts. You have a reputation for that, and that is why the directorate have asked you to do it. And, above all, look out for international complications. See you again before you go. We have your address; will send funds there. You speak German. Keep your German ears open. This may mean big things.'

It did mean big things, thought Geoffrey, as he stumbled down the rickety stairs and made his way to the 'Dogberry'. It happened to be a committee night, so he was in luck, and several specials were there—men who had done a dozen campaigns and who had witnessed Czars' funerals and coronations, and historical events of all types; and to one of these—Dalton—he told his errand, and soon had a dozen valuable tips as to telegraphic obstacles, how to get quickly on the wires, and how *sang-froid* would overmaster even Russian officialdom sometimes. He got congratulations on his fortune, but not petty envy or spiteful thwarting; all the men had done something; were too successful themselves to show malicious, rancorous hate at another man's success. Just later in the evening Dacre, a well-known Art war correspondent, came in, and going across to Dalton, said, 'Look here, I've got to do this royal wedding for the *Colonist*, with a new man who's doing it for the *Syndicate*—Lowther. Anybody know him?'

'*Vla!*' said Dalton, waving his hand to Geoffrey. 'A good man and true. "A most desartless man."'

'What, a Dogberry? Come, that's good; glad to work with you,' and he shook hands heartily like the old campaigner he was.

Here was another pleasure to work with so famous a sketcher.

'Will it lead to a row?' asked Captain Hodson.

'Not yet. It will kill the Suzerainty of Turkey and build up a buffer to Russia.'

'And push Russia out in another place,' said the tall Harry Jessop.

'Russia never stops,' said Dalton, 'and a wonderfully smart lot of fellows their frontier men are. Alive.'

'When do you go?' said Barker, who had just come in, to Dacre.

'Get there before the "Queen's arrival."'

'The Queen!' thought Geoffrey, and his head began to swim.

'But is the old lady going?'

'Settled to-day; you will see it announced to-morrow.'

'H'm! that's a nasty one. You fellows are in luck; it's big, big,' said Jessop. 'Make a job for us, perhaps.'

The theatre men now began to come in, and the talk went from work to a new piece at the Lyceum, and Geoffrey thought he had better get out into the air; sensations were already too thickly clustered in his brain, and so he walked down the Strand to his quiet little hotel, and in his room jotted down notes of his plan of campaign and how to deal with pageant and politics — when suddenly the glimpse he had caught of Evelyn Maitland flashed into his mind and he shut up his note-book. What a contrast, he thought, between her life and his!

He had no difficulty in getting time for this expedition, and the *Greyborough Gazette*, he found, was

to have the *Syndicate's* articles, and what was more, the *Syndicate* announced them as signed by him, so that his friends, the Hawthornes, would read his description. He had no time to see them, and within a fortnight he was away *en route* for this remote corner of Europe, where this matrimonial alliance of two of the greatest ruling families of the world was to be sealed.

All the world seemed wrapped in snow, the cliffs of Dover, as he boarded the Ostend boat, were glittering in the winter's sun, but tales of snowed-up trains made him dread a block and failure.

But on they went. Brussels, Namur, Metz, Strasburg—and then at 4 a.m., with a thermometer at thirty below freezing, he was turned out to wait four hours—as the connecting train was gone. After an hour's freezing a local train going to another junction turned up, and, thankful for the heat in the carriages, he got on, and ere the short winter's day was ended was in the village town—all ice-clad and festooned with hoar frost and flags—where half the European crowned heads were assembling.

Not a soul was in the frozen white roads; no conveyance; but he found his way to the post-office, got an interview with the postmaster, and handed him a roll of bank notes on account, and learnt, by the astonishment of the worthy man, he was the first who had opened an account in this lavish way, and he was not exacting about the rate of exchange, but had quite an interesting chat with the old official before leaving. Then he passed up through the little town, noted mediæval castle and modern palace, picturesque, snowy heights and frozen river, and

then getting to his rooms, that had been settled by Prince Ratisbon, the Court Chamberlain, finished off quietly an article he had written in the train giving the local picture, and posted it. His own straitened means taught him it was useless to waste money in wiring what would be in time if posted.

Then he found that for the commissariat department they were to go to the hotel, and out across the ice-clad roads he went, into a snug inn, where an excellent dinner, enough even for his appetite, put him in good mood to face any difficulties. Other correspondents came in by the next train, and the next morning Dacre turned up in heavy fur coat, and fur cap and gloves, looking like a North Pole explorer; and certainly the cold warranted it, for the thermometer had dropped to fifty below freezing, English reckoning.

There was no time to think even of the cold that was crisp and clear. Royal arrivals had to be watched, the castle people interviewed, from Court Chamberlain and marshals; and even dressers questioned.

At the station kings and princes and dukes chatted freely with the correspondents as they walked backwards and forwards in the frozen snow, and just before one royal train arrived Geoffrey was fortunate to be talking in German with the royal father of the bridegroom. The talk was suddenly interrupted, and, as a matter of etiquette, the prince's aide-de-camp came up and continued the chat—a lucky incident that had great effect—and the same evening he was ushered into the rooms of an English royal duke and was honoured with a conversation, and on leaving—a

king being announced—he was informed of a special dignity conferred upon the duke that gave him a bit of news.

Geoffrey got off his wires easily; the old postmaster was always there, and sometimes reached his hand over the clerks' heads for Geoffrey's despatches, as he always took them himself, and at last the bells of the Angels' greeting (Angelus) woke him on the bridal morn, ere it was light. He went early to the castle, went through the long corridors, vaulted and armour hung, connecting castle with church, and got all described and only the order of procession to fill in. When he got into the church he found the correspondents' seats by no means good, but luckily, when ambassadors and *attachés* and dignitaries were beginning to fill the church, he spied the aide-de-camp, and just before the royal procession was about to enter he went to him and asked him a question, and then explained how little could be seen from their positions; but before an answer came, the head of the royal procession was seen entering, the orchestra struck up a march, and Geoffrey remained where he was, and was soon mixed up with the crowd of be-ordered and bestarred royalties in an excellent position to watch even the facial expression of Queen and Kaiser, Tsarevitch and King, princes and princesses.

He stood behind a burly officer and jotted down reminder notes; got out of the church quickly and rushed to his rooms and wrote as he had never written before; rushed to the post and found he was first on the wires. Then back to the castle for the banquet, and late at night he walked up once more from the post with the day's work done, yearning for

a smoke and a drink, for he was madly thirsty. But he had hardly got into the inn when in came a Vienna correspondent for an English agency.

'Look here, Lowther,' he said, 'you were on the royal carpet. Was the Turkish Ambassador there?'

'Certainly not,' said Geoffrey. 'No Turk was there. Not a fez in the church.'

'Hurrah!' said the Viennese. 'Young and Hutchinson have wired he was. What have you said?'

'Nothing.'

'I've said he wasn't. The Servians are mad about it—an insult to Russia. Complications, dear boy, complications,' and he laughed heartily. But ere Geoffrey could light a smoke, in came Young and Hutchinson.

'Look here, Lowther! you were up close enough. Was the Turkish Ambassador there?'

'No,' said Geoffrey.

'Are you sure?'

'Positive. I've been East and know what a fez is.'

The two correspondents looked at one another and disappeared.

'They've gone to contradict their wires,' said the Viennese.

But in a quarter of an hour they were back.

'They say he is in the town.'

'That's not being at the wedding, and is a bigger insult,' said Geoffrey.

'Are you sure he wasn't there?'

'Certain.'

'Well, it's queer; the Bulgarians say he was there.'

'Let us make sure,' said Geoffrey; 'go across to

the palace and ask plainly Prince Ratisbon, he will tell us.'

So out across the white, icy snow went the four correspondents; but Prince Ratisbon was still at the castle, so his secretary appeared, and told them the Turkish Ambassador had arrived.

'But he was not at the wedding,' said Geoffrey.

'No, he was not,' said the polite secretary.

Hurriedly they got out of the palace. The Viennese executed a war dance on the icy, sparkling snow—a dance of delight that he was right; the other two told him he was no gentleman; and an idea flashed into Geoffrey's mind, and he left them quietly and went to the postmaster's house, got hold of the postmaster and asked him if the Turkish Ambassador was come.

'Yes,' said the old man, 'he is here.'

'Yes, but where? How can I find him?'

'There was no room for him, and no one to meet him at the station, so I asked him to come here,' calmly replied the postmaster.

'Here! send in my card and say I want to speak with him,' said Geoffrey; and in a few minutes he was sitting chatting with the Turkish Ambassador, learning how it was he was too late for the ceremony, and perchance thus obeyed his master the Sultan's command and wishes. The difference in longitude still gave time to get a short wire of this across to London, and so it happened that Geoffrey Lowther's papers alone had this important news and interview, that the London editor did not diminish in length or in importance.

Four days after Geoffrey again climbed up those dirty, dark, Fleet Street stairs, rapped on that half

door again, and the cheery voice called out, 'Come in. Ah! Mr Lowther, back again! Have you seen what the *Despatch* says about you in a leader. Why, you are made as a special correspondent. Well, it was very good stuff. I'm busy now, let us have your account,' and down the stairs again went Geoffrey to the 'Dogberry' to get a copy of the *Despatch.*

'The polished one' met him on the stairs.

'Back again, sir! They've been talking about you. Mr Dacre's back too. Mr Dalton's gone to China.'

'Just bring me the *Despatch* for the last day or two,' said Geoffrey, and in the number the day after the wedding he read,—

'The brilliant, vivid description telegraphed last night by our Special Correspondent of the Royal Wedding Ceremonies will be perused by all classes of readers with interest and pleasure. If considered merely as a specimen of graphic word painting it is a literary treat.' He skipped the rest, but at the foot of the leaderette he read, 'We feel assured of thanks for having arranged for so admirable a description of the scene.' The headlines positively startled him, and only now the whole importance of the matter came home to him, and with it a wave of thankfulness that he had done the work so well.

BOOK III

CHAPTER I

FOR HIS OWN COUNTRY

GREYBOROUGH was discussing vehemently a local question of development that two generations had discussed. New men rushed hotly into the fight and old hands smiled, saying, 'He will soon get what he wants.' And on Geoffrey Lowther's return he found the local papers full of this perennial matter, and no one even spoke to him of the event in Central Europe that had threatened European peace. His articles had appeared in full, but such distant matters did not interest Greyborough, and he was at once pulled back to a calm existence that was good for thought.

Work, piles of it, awaited him of a very different type to brilliant description writing or pleasant picture painting by pen or brush, but the joy at his return in his own little home, the fingers of his blind sister passing lightly over his face to see if it had altered after seeing so many royal personages, pulled him quickly together; for on asking the *Syndicate* secretary if there were more commissions, he had been told they hoped to avail themselves again some day of his services, and on going over one of those business lists that register the troubles of the impecunious, he saw the names of one artist and two well-known journalists struggling to raise money, and yet

bearing names, the world thought, of wealthy men. One he knew had lately lost a position through a change of ownership. But the remembrances of his work were pleasant to him, and he had gained material for many an article; in fact, he began to think there was matter for a book somewhere in his brain, but who would care to read a book of his when none of the hundreds who now met him in business even cared to say a word on his articles.

But there was that leaderette. Oh, if he could throw up this second life, live wholly his first—but how? Some weeks after his return he was in London, sent up for the day only on a picture errand, but in coming from Pall Mall to the Strand he ran against Barker.

'What, you up? Why, we have not met since your Danube expedition! Come down to the "Writers'," ' was his greeting.

'I have to get back to Greyborough to-night.'

'Oh, hang Greyborough! Why don't you pitch it?'

'I can't,' said Geoffrey, sorrowfully.

'Well, it's tea-time at the "Writers';" they're great at tea, come and have some.'

'Really—' began Geoffrey.

'Oh, yes, you have heaps of time, take a later train,' and he led him on to the 'Writers' '—housed in a more palatial building than the 'Dogberry,' far more sedate and solemn were the members thereof—and they took off their hats and coats in the hall ere entering the reading-room, where half-a-dozen men were behind newspapers, at first not looking round the corner of them, to see who had entered.

Tea and toast was ordered, and Barker began to

chat on the Danube errand, when a man who had been reading the *Pall Mall* suddenly put it down and said, 'Hullo, Barker, didn't see it was you! Have you been on the blue Danube?'

'No, my friend here, Geoffrey Lowther, the journalist—' then, turning to Geoffrey, he said, 'You know some of Mr Brandon Jeffries' books;' and Geoffrey recognised the man as a well-known author of vigorous novels and one or two thoughtful books of distant travel. A man well on the right side of forty; bright, cheery, but pale-faced; one who had seen life in various phases and who had roughed it in bitter experiences.

'But what do you want in this club?' he asked Geoffrey, abruptly. 'Not going to become an author, I hope?'

'I've no time to write books,' said Geoffrey.

'That's right. Stick to journalism; you may get some bread and cheese at that, but I'm damned if you do at book writing. Look here, Barker, I'd sooner break stones for a living than write books.'

'Well, you've tried both, old man,' said Barker, 'so you ought to know.'

'Oh, it's too beastly wearisome. I've written twenty books—all failures.'

'But I've seen some splendid reviews,' said Geoffrey.

'Oh, reviews! Oh, yes, I've had good reviews. I tell you straight, I could have earned more at stone breaking, did earn more on canal digging.'

'You needn't make a fuss about it, Jeffries,' said a thin-faced, fair-moustached man. 'I'm stony broke. Don't know where the next sou is to come from, but

I've got thirty shillings still and that's every stiver. Oh, don't you fellows laugh. I'm stony broke, it's God's truth.'

'Better get an advance on your next book,' said Jeffries.

'You can. I can't.'

The man was well-dressed, and Lowther wondered who he was; but he was a little surprised later on, as they left the club, to hear he was the author of a brilliant Parisian *causerie* in a monthly, for which he got a couple of guineas, and the author of three or four books, one at least of which had given matter for articles in many a newspaper. 'Surely,' he thought, 'it was good I should come in to hear this talk,' and when he went out with Barker, he asked, 'Are all the members of the club like that?'

'Well, you see most of them have means. Some few make money by their books, but more don't. Oh, Literature is a big lottery—I should say scribbling. Literature, good literature, is no lottery. It never, well rarely, pays until after many years of hard work.'

'I thought of writing a book,' said Geoffrey, as they turned the corner by Trafalgar Square.

'Can you afford to?' asked Barker.

After what he had heard, he felt he could not; but, as he bid his friend good-bye, he nevertheless felt he would have to, so subtly and steadfastly does the fascination of writing hold fast to its victims. But he determined to hold on to the position that secured to those he loved a home.

When he reached that home, late in the night, he found a London letter awaiting him from the Central Journalists' Committee, speaking of his work in the

East, and Berlin, and on the Danube, as important work; and suggesting his name should appear in an honourable position on the list of honoured members. 'What will Charlie Mudd's friends say to this?' he thought. 'They'll hardly like it.'

He quickly learnt what Charlie's Chums thought of it. He was elected to the position at the next meeting, where many of the older members were present, but at once someone began an attack. After he had received all credentials confirming his election, it was proved all the elections that day were invalid, and Geoffrey refused to be again nominated.

He had not seen his friends the Hawthornes since his great journey, and now that Miss Maitland no longer called in and chatted upon Art, he quite longed for a talk with some congenial minds; but the fact of not hearing from, or seeing, Mr Hawthorne made him dread if any friend had been trying to break that friendship for him; but at last came a note, 'Why have you not called? Why, we all want to hear about the royalties and the diamonds. The ladies are quite excited over your delightful descriptions, and Fraulein Jordan has lately made a conquest of a "friend" of yours; her information may be of some value to you.'

What did this mean? Were his misgivings right? Has some 'damned good-natured friend' been underhandedly at work. But before he could go down to Netherleigh, where the Hawthornes had remained this winter, he received letters of thanks from the Court Chamberlain and from the private secretary of a royal duke, both by command, thanking him for his articles; a little honour he was

glad to have to show his good friend John Hawthorne.

But still a couple of weeks elapsed ere he could run down to Netherleigh, and in the interval he had another letter that he determined also to show to Mr Hawthorne. It was on a Wednesday he received this letter, asking him to be at a meeting to be held in a small town some thirty miles away, on the Saturday, as a resolution to erase his name from the membership would be proposed, as he was not a reporter on a local journal.

Charlie is pegging away, he thought. Why does that man hate me? We must see what the London Council of the Union have to say to this. Then he thought, Is it worth fighting? But anger bubbled up in him as he felt this was but a step to injure his reputation, and he determined to defeat this local clique, jealous of his success. Why not have called the meeting here? That was Charlie's 'cuteness.

But, instead of attending this meeting called to degrade him, he sent a copy of the notice on to the London secretary, and on Saturday was once more in the pleasant home in Netherleigh. The children met him ere he arrived at the gate, and Bobby ran back and dragged out Fraulein to see Mr Lowther, who had seen all the kings and queens.

'Oh, Mr Lowther, Mr Hawthorne will be pleased to see you again, after all your travels;' and in a little triumphant procession he was led up the hard, frost-crisped lawn, up the balcony into the house; but, save servants, they found it empty. Mr and Mrs Hawthorne had gone out, so his coat and hat and stick were taken by eager young hands, and he was

led into the drawing-room overlooking the sea, and he had to tell the youngsters how Queen and Emperor, Tsarevich and King looked.

'Did they all wear crowns?' asked Midge.

'Not one of them.'

'Oh, what a shame!' came a chorus; and he had to answer all sorts of queer questions, until at length Fraulein sent them all out to let Mr Lowther have a little quiet. Then he was able to ask the question that was hanging on his lips.

'Who is this friend of mine of whom Mr Hawthorne speaks?'

'He is such a friend! Can't you guess his name?'

'I have very few real friends. I think, if it is a real friend, I should have to say Mr Hawthorne.'

'Oh, you have more friends than that; guess now.'

'I cannot.'

'Well, a nice young man. Oh, beautifully dressed. Such ties and gaiters, so nice. I nearly fell in love with his clothes; well, he thought I did. Oh, he is a great swell, and so influential; only his nose, that wretched little nose, will look red; isn't it a pity?'

'But why is he my friend? I don't recognise the description.'

'Oh, he talked of you. You see he did not know I liked you.'

'Thank you, Fraulein.'

'Oh, I do. But I made-believe I didn't, when I found he would talk.'

'And you are soon to be stopped in your little game. The Union is to come down upon you, and

you won't get a thing in any paper. No editor dare take your—let me see, what was the word?'

'Copy,' murmured Geoffrey.

'Yes, copy. It was all bally rot using your stuff. They are going to have a meeting; it was quite funny the words he used.'

'Charlie Mudd!' said Geoffrey.

'Yes. Isn't he a swell? I felt honoured to walk with him.'

'How far did you go?'

'All along the cliffs, for I did want to hear all about you. But you won't go to any more royal shows. They will stop that.'

'Had he been drinking?'

'No, I took his arm and looked up in his face, and he did talk.'

'Did he kiss you?'

'Mr Lowther! A clothes-horse like that!'

'Did he try to?'

She coloured slightly.

'The blackguard! Da—!'

She put her hand to his lips, he took it forcibly away. 'Why did you talk to him at all?'

'To hear about you. I thought he would tell me of your success.'

'Success! He could not understand that. How did you stop him?'

'Let go his arm and looked at him.'

'Did that stop him?'

'Didn't it! And then I asked him, after a bit, how they were going to crush you, as you wanted crushing, and he told me they were going to have a special meeting to get rid of you in Greyborough,

and all had agreed to take care all the London editors knew you had been kicked out. But I said, "Some may be there who like him." "Oh, I'll see to that. The meeting won't be in Greyborough, and you will never see his name in our papers about anything, take my—davit," I think he said.'

'How could you get him to let his tongue run away with him in this fashion! Surely he had not been drinking.'

'Oh, it is delightful to see people in their true, native colours. He was simply lovely.'

'Well, you got the truth out of him, for here is the notice of the meeting.'

'Why, it is to-day, and you have come here to see us.'

'A much more delightful occupation.'

'Now don't you begin to flatter. Oh, I hate it, don't—don't do it.'

'Do you remember long ago saying to me, "I don't flatter, if I flattered anyone I should you, but I don't." You did not speak English as well then as now,' said Geoffrey, 'but let me retaliate upon you with your own words. But how could you have got Charlie to so chatter on?'

'Oh, he was intoxicated with his own conceit.'

'And your eyes?'

'Perhaps so,' and she laughed a bubbling, jolly laugh.

'But you should have gone to the meeting. Oh, wouldn't I have given it to them.'

'I prefer leaving it alone. The London Council will have to settle this.'

'Will they? Oh, I am glad of that. They will crush you here, if they can.'

'You mean Charlie's Chums. They may be allowed to have some power locally, but they have none elsewhere, and will probably do good.'

'Do you think so? I *am* pleased.'

'Really?' said Geoffrey.

'Very really;' and she unconsciously held out both her hands to him, and looked so fully in his eyes that he saw a new, tender beauty in hers, and said to himself, 'No wonder Charlie Mudd made an ass of himself under her manipulation.' Then, he knew not why, but the vision of the meek and Rev. Nicholas Dawne came before him, and he felt cross.

But they now heard voices in the hall, and in came Mr Hawthorne and his wife, both heartily cordial in their greeting to Geoffrey, congratulating him upon his success and his articles, foretelling all sorts of *kudos* and good things in the near future.

'And in the near home plenty of hate,' said Mr Hawthorne.

'I really wanted to have a word with you on that,' said Geoffrey.

'Just so, I knew it.'

'Then we will leave you together for a while. You will stay to dinner,' said Mrs Hawthorne, and she took Fraulein with her from the room.

'Well,' said Mr Hawthorne, when Geoffrey had shown him the letters and notice, 'what are you going to do?'

'Inform the General Council! Let them deal with it in London.'

'Good; your jury here would be packed. It is very annoying this attack, but it is the inevitable outcome of success. Don't let it thwart you for a moment, go straight on, and turn their attack to your own use.'

'How can I?'

'I cannot say, but good will come of it. Just as Fraulein here was quite aroused to indignation for you, so will the world, when you have lived through this petty opposition, recognise your work. But, remember this, petty souls are never submissive; it is but great souls that yield reverence to what is over them; and don't look for respect from petty minds, you won't get it.'

'But cannot one influence such minds?'

'Strive to, by all means. When you have influenced them by good work they are no longer petty. You have won their reverence. By the way, have you met Donald Bain lately?'

'No, what of him?' said Geoffrey.

'He is no friend of yours, but he has become very friendly with Sir Henry Habgood. So that you will get no recognition there, I expect. It may be awkward for your local work. He even visits Sir Henry, I believe.'

The little scene at Piccadilly Circus came into Geoffrey's brain—should he tell it? No, he would not hint at scandal, so he merely said, 'But the Habgoods are mostly in town.'

'Oh, Donald has been bragging of receptions in Belgrave Square and that sort of thing. I only mentioned his name to put you on your guard. By the way, I can get you the legal view of your position.

I remember now the coroner for Brandbury, a solicitor friend of mine, is the chairman of the journalists in his district ; he writes for a local paper, he will give me his opinion.'

'Ah, they did not call their meeting there, nor at Yeoham, where Alderman Southwick, a local tradesman and proprietor, is chairman.'

'No, our friend Mr Mudd is 'cute. Fraulein asked him if he was not sorry he had such a name. "Sorry!" he exclaimed, "why it's distinctive! Everyone knows who Charlie Mudd is when you say the name only." He is a queer type, but unscrupulous.'

'Worth studying, but annoying,' said Geoffrey.

'Oh, study him, but don't let him annoy you.'

'But look at this worry,' and he held out the notice.

'It will work for good,' said John Hawthorne, emphatically ; 'you and your work will be better known to the chiefs of the profession. I take it, the great journalists are the world rovers in the worlds of Science, Art and Literature ; or, literally, the world travellers, the men who write on what they know, not on what other people know. The men who give us daily the records of the world's progress. The useful journalists are the stenographers, those who take down for us the words of other men, that they die not still-born. Are these not the clerks of the profession? The editors, the article writers and the specials, the chiefs?'

'Charlie Mudd would hardly agree with you.'

'"No," he would say, "we are going to run this little show." But I will let you know my friend the coroner's opinion in a few days. Meanwhile go on

with your work, and don't let these gnat bites, as Tennyson calls them, worry you. They are not even mosquitoes. Come, see the winter sun is setting, let us do a stroll before dinner.'

And the two men went down the steps on to the hard frozen lawn, and out along the cliff edge and watched the ruddy globe sink slowly into the sea. Geoffrey thanked God for the peace and beauty of the scene, and for the friendship of his good friend who walked beside him.

Suddenly, when they had turned their backs on the waning glory in the west, Geoffrey asked, 'Is the Rev. Dawne still proselytising?'

'What, with Fraulein? Hardly so assiduously; but marked books still come, so the children say. I take no notice of it. Rumour says he may leave shortly.'

'Leave Netherleigh?'

'His aunt, who is patroness of a rich living, has designs on him for a young wealthy ward of hers.'

'Then what right has he to be—?'

'Oh, my dear Lowther, have you not yet learnt curates are priests, and priests have no sex? Curates are chartered—well, conversationalists.'

'But you ought not to allow it. I beg pardon, sir. I have no right to interfere.'

'My wife has warned Fraulein, but I fear she is bitten.'

The night was shrouding in, and the sense of worry that the pure nature had dispersed, seemed to renew itself in Geoffrey's brains, why he could not tell, but the bright chat at the dinner table

again dispersed it, and when he was in the train running back to old Greyborough, the laughing chubby face of Hilda Jordan was before him; but, intruding with it, came the pale face of the curate; he felt alternately happy and worried. But Charlie Mudd's manœuvres were totally forgotten.

CHAPTER II

'THE FIELDS ARE WHITE'

It was the opening of Parliament after a General Election. All the new men were hastening to town, elated with the fact that M.P. stood after their names. Some of the old hands who had been ousted were writing to the House officials to clear their lockers, but keep their things, they would be back soon. And it was upon this day that the great *procès* of 'Charlie's Chums *v.* G. L.,' as Charlie put it, was to come off. So that the early morning train from Greyborough had on board some Greyboroughites who have entered into this story. In a first-class carriage was Donald Bain—well-dressed, swagger, a toff, as his friends described him, saying 'How d'ye do' from the window to acquaintances *de haut en bas.* He saluted in this fashion a quiet, business-like-looking gentleman who passed on and took a seat in a third-class, where Geoffrey Lowther was seated alone.

'Ha! Mr Lowther, going to town? Shall be pleased with your company. I see our great actor Donald Bain is in the train, he must travel first-class. Humph!' He spoke as though annoyed at Donald's expenditure, and Geoffrey remembered he was a broker who knew a good deal of the means of certain merchants in Greyborough.

'What had annoyed him?' thought Geoffrey.

'Going up on business? Not off on another expedition, I suppose?'

'No, but going to arrange for a somewhat extensive journey.'

'East again?'

'No, North. Art in Northern Capitals, and to include St Petersburg, I'm glad to say.'

'Much Art there?'

'The Hermitage.'

'Ah, yes, your knowledge must be invaluable to your people; they ought to make you partner. Anything special on in town?'

He could not tell him of his real mission, but as he had found Parliament opened the same day, he had secured a note from a Cabinet Minister, through a parliamentary friend, and had got the entry to the inner lobby, and intended making an article of the little scene of the opening of Parliament; so he said this was his business.

'Oh, interesting. You will make a good sketch, let us hear how old Habgood is greeted. By the way, is there anything in this talk about his young wife and Bain?'

Geoffrey felt shot. Surely that fair face was not masked in deceit and vice. He did not believe it, and said he had heard nothing.

'Ah, well, the old Gloucestershire proverb, "The head that's grey, suits not for maiden's play," is pretty true still, unless the maidens are antique, and Donald is a contrast to Sir Henry.'

'He must be in funds to travel first-class,' said Geoffrey.

'Funds!' and the broker laughed. 'Yes, he's got money from somewhere; he tried it on Bryant.'

'Tried what?' said Lowther, bluntly.

'Oh, advancing money on a bill of lading, but Bryant spoke to me about it, on an Australian sailing ship, a pretty long date that; queer thing was, too, he only wanted to borrow a small sum, comparatively, on the value. Why didn't he go to the bank? The man's a fraud, and Greyborough believes in him. Talks of his Scotch property and the mortgages he holds. Who the devil was he? No one knows.'

Donald had certainly riled the broker, and Geoffrey was getting interesting information. But he asked, 'Do you think his business is not good?'

'His business! He has none. He is an agent with very little business; and whisky, play-acting, and worse, far worse — old Solomon knew a thing or two about women when he wrote that seventh chapter of his Proverbs, and if, as he says, her house is the way to hell, why, Donald Bain is housed there half his time.'

'And yet,' thought Geoffrey, 'this man's name is linked with Evelyn Maitland's.' These words were terrible. Could he see her, tell her the truth. She was nothing to him now; his folly was over. But he must warn her; yet how? And the thought of his great *procès* and of Parliament all were swallowed up in this hideous thing.

But when he got to town he had to cast the thoughts from him, and think of the statement he would have to make of the attack made on him, leading up to this climax.

It was in an upper room that he found the Central

Committee gathered together. Sir Harold Fergusson, M.P., in the chair, who was proprietor of several journals; and around the long table were gallery men and editors, and chief reporters, mostly of North Country journals, and to his surprise the Greyborough man who was to sustain the attack upon him was a genial, easy-going reporter, for whom he had a good deal of respect. Charlie Mudd had made a strategic movement to the rear, and 'induced someone else to get into the van.'

It was an amusing scene, ending in a woful defeat of Charlie's Chums, and a flattering speech from the M.P. on Geoffrey's journalistic work. He could not resist sending a wire to Mr Hawthorne, just the words, 'Charlie's Chums utterly defeated,' and he was then able to get away down to the House before the Speaker took his seat, but as he was passing near the 'Dogberry' he looked in, and as he headed the stairs 'the polished one' met him with the words, 'Why, Mr Lowther, we haven't seen you for some time. There's been a letter waitin' here for you. I'll bring it,' and Geoffrey went into the reading-room, where he was greeted by three or four 'desartless' ones. He said nothing of the great 'trial scene,' for but few of the Dogberries were members of the Union. But in came 'the polished one' with a large envelope with a gilt and red, showy crest, directed to Geoffrey Lowther, Esq., Correspondent of the *Whitehall Gazette*, The Dogberry Club, etc. 'What is this?' thought Geoffrey, but on opening it he found it was an invitation to a reception at a house in Park Lane, to meet a famous artist.

'Do you know who these people are?' he

asked, turning to a man, who was on the *Morning Post.*

'Oh, you've had one of those. They are good for a swell feed; meet a lot of City people and a few somebodies who go in for Art, and their wine is good.'

'But why do they invite me? I don't know them.'

'But you write on Art, and they hope you will speak of their collection, and they send us lots of pars.'

'Is it worth going to?'

'My dear boy, if you've nothing else to do, yes. Is not a good glass of wine always worth going to?'

Geoffrey stuffed the card into his pocket and went westward to the House, made his way through the outer lobby in through the corridor with his permit to the inner lobby, where he found a jovial cluster of M.P.'s all congratulating each other on their return, men passing from group to group saluting new men and welcoming them. He stood on the outer edge of these for some time, when he suddenly saw Sir Henry Habgood come out of the not yet *en séance* House, and walk with that assumed stateliness that so impressed his local committee men through the lobby, but he was noticed by none. No hearty slap on the shoulders or grip of the hand proved he had made friends or won respect here; he passed alone through the group, close by Geoffrey, but without sign of recognition, to the outer lobby and ere long returned, but still ungreeted, and then passed into the House just as a little rush told the Speaker had taken his seat; and in a very short time the doors were shut, Black Rod appeared, gently

hurled his rod three times at the door, that opened, and out trooped the faithful and unfaithful Commons, to hear Her Majesty's message.

Just then his friend who had obtained the order for him came up and told him the Public Gallery was full, but if he would wait a few minutes he would be able to pass him to the Distinguished Strangers' Gallery, from whence he could watch the opening of the session. A pleasant little surprise this, the more so as Sir Henry Habgood had so pointedly cut him, and ere long he was ascending the little staircase from the inner lobby, and took his seat looking down into the House.

Soon the Commons came trooping back and the work began, but Geoffrey's eyes were fixed on Sir Henry Habgood, seated alone on a back seat, speaking still to no one. At last he got up and disappeared, and, as though Geoffrey's mind followed his steps, he saw the right hand door of the entrance into the Lords' Gallery open, and Sir Henry appeared; took a seat and sat there for some time, then got up and went back again to his seat in the House. The whole action seemed to betray utter loneliness and absence of interest in all around him, save that action of going into the Peers' Gallery. Did he dream his money could purchase a peerage? Perhaps even so; and as the idea struck him, instinctively Geoffrey took the showy crested card from his pocket and the thought flashed in his mind—Would Lady Habgood be there? A lot of City people? That meant rich people who bought their way into certain phases of society. It was possible, it was probable; he would go to this reception.

He still looked over the balustrade of the gallery down into the House, and across to the gallery men, who took down the 'deadly drip of damnable iteration,' but he was but there in body; his mind was with Evelyn Maitland, back in the Art Galleries at Greyborough and at Netherleigh. How besmeared and smirched was her form that had been to him very fair! 'Would Donald Bain be there?' flashed the thought.

'No, she shall not fall into that slough of filth without warning;' and he started up so suddenly, he alarmed the dozing attendant at the end of the seat, made his way down the little stairway and through the inner lobby, where clusters of M.P.'s were being questioned by journalists or worried by constituents, on through the corridor and outer lobby, and on past the mighty relic of the Witenagemot of Alfred's days, to the open air.

He walked back to the Dogberry Club deep in thought, for if events worked out as he had a keen presentiment they would, he had a terrible task before him. He was going to accuse a woman, for whom he had held a life-long deep respect—'ay, call it respect,' he said to himself—of the foulest crime a woman can commit. But had she not already committed a crime by bartering her body to that lonely, wizened little old man whom now she hated?

He found only two men at the club—the burly Jessop and the artist Cairns. The latter he thought might have been invited, so he asked him if he intended going to this Park Lane affair.

'Don't think so. Barker's going. By the way, if you care for it, hang on to the end; they get up a bit

of a dance sometimes when the crowd is gone. Barker's coming in to dinner, he knows the people.'

So Geoffrey returned to his hotel, dressed, and got back to the Dogberry to dinner, where he found a jovial little crowd of about a dozen deep in argument on the China question, for Dalton's letters were coming home, and there was a famous Thibetan traveller present who knew the East. But he could not heed this talk; his mind was absorbed in what must come, and yet he did not know even that Evelyn Maitland would be there.

It was late before he could get Barker to start, but at last they jumped into a hansom and drove away up Regent Street, and cut across into Park Lane and pulled up at one of the smaller of those expensive abodes. A thin stream was still ascending the stairs as they entered, and soon they were announced in a crowded room, where the host, a little, short, Quirk-like man, and hostess, a fine, handsome woman, were receiving; and they passed on into the crowded rooms. They soon met men they knew, but Geoffrey got away from his friend. Was his presentiment to be fulfilled? Was the task to be his? It seemed absurd in all London. Yet as he moved on amidst the crush of more women than men, the type of many there were of the Habgood type. 'Perhaps,' he thought, 'they sent their invitations to the "Dogberry" to get men for this improvised dance Cairns spoke of. Certainly some of the older men looked hardly as of those who had danced in their youth.'

But in all the crowd that fair, Madonna-like face was not. He began to breathe again, and was able

to interest himself in the groups and in some excellent music; the announcements grew less and less, only one or so between the songs. A famous contralto had just finished a song that had hushed all chatter, when in the silence that followed the buzz of applause, like a pistol shot there came upon his ears, 'Lady Habgood, Mr Donald Bain!'

He was standing, and he clutched at the arm of a man next him. 'I beg pardon,' he said, 'I slipped.' But he moved back to recover himself ere he should meet the Greyborough pair. At the end of this *salon* was an alcove-like chamber filled up with heavy curtains and luxurious divan couches; a deeply-coloured lamp swung overhead and gave a faint light to this little Eastern lounge; he pushed the curtains aside and sank on one of the seats. What should he do? Could he do anything? What right had he to interfere? But he started up at this. The right every man has to stop a miserable wrong; and he went out again from the dim light into the brilliant blaze and amidst the moving throng, many now were making their way down to the supper-room.

He was standing near the door, still in worried thought, when he heard, in the voice he knew so well, 'Why, Mr Lowther! I thought we should meet you sometimes. I often hear your name mentioned.'

He turned, and with a bow took her proffered hand.

She had been talking with a stranger, who moved away as she had spoken to him.

'I am glad to meet you, Lady Habgood,' he said; then, as the idea rushed into his mind that this

might give him the chance, he said, 'Are you engaged? Might I have the—honour—of taking you down?'

'Oh, yes. It will be quite pleasant to have someone from Greyborough to chat with. I think Mr Bain has gone down, he has disappeared.'

'We shall find him below,' thought Geoffrey; but he led the way through the now thinned crowds on the stairways, down into a room fitted as a tent, where a chattering, laughing crowd were half seated, half standing, eating, drinking; he edged his way into a distant corner, and catching an attendant told him what to bring them. But nothing coming, he made his way to the centre table and secured the attention of a waiter, and was making his way back when a loud guffaw caught his ear above the birr and clatter. He looked round and saw Donald with three or four men; their heads were close together. Donald held a wine glass in his hand, but it was tilted, and as he raised it to his lips, when the laugh subsided, some of its bright amber contents went on to the floor.

'Already been drinking,' muttered Geoffrey, as he turned and made his way back to Evelyn Maitland, for such, in his pity, to him she still was.

He said nothing of what he had seen, and silence seem to possess them both, broken only by a remark on the music or the crowd; and ere long she said, 'This place is very warm, shall we go upstairs?' As they neared the door again that guffaw rose above the general hum. 'I think that is Mr Bain,' said Geoffrey.

'Yes, why does he laugh so loudly?'

'Perhaps you had better ask the butler.'

The colour flushed to her forehead, and she looked very angry.

They were on the stairs. 'I saw Sir Henry to-day,' said Geoffrey, 'and I wanted an opportunity to speak to you.'

'Did you? Where?'

'In the Members' lobby.'

'But I thought—how did you get there?'

'We correspondents get into all sorts of places, but I came here hoping to meet you.'

'How strange! I was thinking of our talk in Greyborough whilst dressing this evening.'

'I knew it,' he answered. 'It was necessary we should meet. I must speak with you,' and he lowered his voice; 'it is of vital importance.'

They had reached the *salon;* it was nearly empty, all had gone down to be fed. He pushed aside the curtain of the Eastern alcove. 'Will you give me but five minutes? I must speak with you.'

'But, Mr Lowther, you quite alarm me.'

'There is cause for alarm,' he said, as she stepped into the dimly-lit recess.

He let fall the curtain, she sank into a seat, and he stood before her. 'You were once my friend,' he began.

'I still am your friend,' she murmured.

'Then do you know what this man is with whom you are here to-night? Do you know the vile life he is leading?'

'You mean he drinks,' she said in a scoffing tone.

'Oh, Miss Maitland! Yes, yes, that is the name I revered you by.'

'You revered me! You show it strangely now.'

'How strangely? When, at the risk of your hatred, I am warning you against a man who is an associate of the vilest women in Greyborough. Drink! that is a clean crime to the rest of his vicious life.' His passion at her scoffing tone carried him out of himself. 'You sold your body for wealth, will you further degrade it with such a man?' He hissed the words into her face. She bowed her head into her hands and there was an awful silence. At last she looked up, her face looked deathly white in the dull gleams of light, but it was hard and fixed.

'Do you know you could have saved me from this—sale?' And she laughed a bitter, hard laugh.

'I, how?'

'By speaking.'

'You say so now. You meet me here. Would you not have turned from me in Greyborough but a year ago? Did I not halt as I was walking past your house as you came out from it and you gave me no look, no smile?'

'Would you have spoken then?'

'I should have been mad enough to do so; but you told me plainly to pass on, and I passed on. Thank God!'

'Oh, don't, don't! I am wretched enough.' The woman in her had given way. The life of love and hope, of honourable struggle and of honourable

success he had given her a glimpse of, had shown her the utter wretchedness of her life of wealth without love. There was another pause.

'Will you take me home, Mr Lowther?'

'No, I will not. I will see you in your carriage; but one word more. May I tell Mr Bain you are gone home and that he is not to call again?' Again there was a silence, but not as before, for the people were regathering in the *salon*, and fingers were rippling over the keys of a piano. At last he saw her hand held out to him, and he heard the words, 'You may.' Her hand was icily cold, and her face was death-like in whiteness.

'Can you venture to pass through the crowd?' he asked.

'Go and order the carriage. I shall be ready when you return.'

There was a sense of positive joyousness in his heart as he got through the crowd on the stairs. He had stopped this awful evil; her consent to be influenced by him proved her sense of her danger. 'Lady Habgood's carriage!' was called, but others were coming up for many were getting away. He got back again to the room, and on entering the alcove found two or three others there chattering and laughing in the dim light. He offered his arm, and together they went down the stairs to the hall; but ere they reached it they met Donald Bain ascending.

'What, Lowther!' he said. 'But Lady Habgood—'

'Wait at the head of the stairs. I will be back directly,' said Geoffrey, and they passed on. The

wraps were obtained, and soon her carriage was there and he handed her in. She held out her hand, it was ungloved, and its pressure sent a thrill of thankfulness through his veins.

'Home!' she said to the coachman, but no word to Geoffrey, and she was gone. He went back to see if Donald Bain was awaiting him, but he was not to be found.

He ran against Barker, however, who introduced him to one or two artists, and in chat his mind was eased from the tension of the past hour. But still he did not see Bain. He must give his message, so he left his friends and passed through the rooms, and at last descended to the supper-room. There he found him, discussing with a waiter, in fairly broad Scotch, the qualities of the wines, for the room was now nearly empty.

'Hallo, Lowther!' said Donald, as soon as he saw him, 'come and have some Perrier; it's the best here, waiter tells me.'

'No, thank you,' said Lowther, to the man who was handing him a glass. 'I want a word with you, Bain.'

'Oh, you do, do you, Lowther? My God! how the devil did you come here?'

'It's a message from Lady Habgood.'

'Oh, yes, of course. I'll be with her directly; 'stonished to see you with her; where is she?'

Geoffrey put his face nearer to him. 'I have seen her to her carriage. She is gone home, and I am to tell you not to call again.' Donald stared at him for a second, and then said,—

'You be damned!'

Geoffrey took no notice of the oath, but left him, and soon was walking home amidst the myriad carriages, down past the Park and on to his hotel, deep in thought of what might have been and what was.

CHAPTER III

'SCOTCHED, NOT KILT'

AS he was again travelling down to Greyborough on the following day after this strange scene in Park Lane, Geoffrey's mind was deeply occupied with the satisfactory thought that now at least the rancorous spite of Charlie Mudd would be allayed; he would hardly lead another attack after so signal a defeat and so cutting a reprimand, but he did not reckon upon the poisonous venom that breeds in little minds, nor did he know that he had thwarted Donald Bain in a desperate venture to gain funds to avoid a crash.

The love of drink had assisted him in two ways, by making his task easy of proving Bain utterly unworthy of woman's friendship, and by giving him the opportunity to speak alone with Evelyn.

He had treated Donald's oath as one of those curses that go home to roost, but the face of Lady Habgood, and that strange pressure of the ungloved hand, as though of friendship, even after that awful denunciation, seemed to haunt him, and intrude on his other pleasanter thoughts.

What a contrast between her now worn and bitter face, but yet with traces of the old, soft beauty, and the open, laughing eyes and vivacious face of Hilda

Jordan; and that young girl, he exclaimed, is the cleverer of the two. What a wife for a diplomatist! She twists people round her fingers. How she will chuckle over the outcome of all this. What a Dogberry is Charlie, and yet the Dogberries would not have him at any price. It is queer how London clubs belie their names. The Savages wear dress coats and eat olives. The Blarers listen to sweet harmony and close virtuously at eleven. The Reform adjure Reforms, and the Dogberries are full of good deserts, hardly a 'desartless' man amongst them.

He had not been at home many days, and was deeply buried in the dry routine of business life, preparing to be able to leave all his work in order for his artistic run North, when letters began to arrive for him from some of the chief of the journalists who had been at his 'trial' as he now called it, congratulating him heartily on his work. Sir Harold Fergusson wrote how glad he was 'to do an act of justice to a member of whom they ought to be proud, and hoping to meet him again frequently.' Others wrote of the enthusiasm of the committee in his favour, and all the letters were very pleasant assurances that his work had satisfied some severe but honest critics. It all repaid him well for the petty worries of his opponents, and amidst these letters came a local letter enclosing the programme of a forthcoming jaunt of Charlie's Chums to a historic district in one of the neighbouring counties.

Was this a white flag of truce and an honest one? He hoped it was, and read the programme for the day. The starting time was given, the arrival, and then several lines of menu of luncheon and tea. No

word of the glorious scenery or of the history of the place, carrying one, as it did, far back into olden days and stirring scenes, but salmon, beef, lamb and ham, and 'probably pigeon pies.' Oh, the licking of lips at this hinted-at delicacy! Then came more eatables, with a suggestive etc.—ah, that etc.; and then still more to eat. Cakes, preserves, salads, even for the tea, and with true business tact the last words were the total cost of this day of such excellent feasting.

'Such a programme, from men who want to be called members of an intellectual profession!' he exclaimed. 'Well, if it is peace I will go; but before he had sent in his name one of his magazine articles, that were now fairly numerous, appeared on 'Artists and their Studios,' and extracts from it appeared in the great North Country dailies and in several London papers.

A few days after their appearance he was hurrying to his work when he saw coming across directly to him a well-known citizen who was noted for his literary tastes and love of books. He put out his hand as he stepped on the pavement, saying, 'Good-morning, Mr Lowther. Let me congratulate you.'

'On what, sir?' said Geoffrey.

'Why, I've been reading your articles for a long time past, but had no idea they were written by you until I saw that disgraceful paragraph in the *Gazette* this morning. I've stopped the paper; it never comes into my house again.'

'What paragraph? What paper?'

'Oh, you have not seen it. Sorry I spoke of it, but I congratulate you; good-morning,' and he was gone.

'What is this? What new dodge are they up to

now? Are not the "probably pigeon pies" after all a peace-offering? Ah, well, let them gird,' and he went on to his work, but he was pleased at the being found out by so good a reader as Mr Warburton.

He got to his work quickly, saw that the ordinary morning routine of dusting and setting in order was well done, and ere ten o'clock had settled down to the office work, when he was pleased to see Mr Hawthorne come in.

'Ha, Lowther, glad to see you! That beastly paragraph brought me in to congratulate you. We enjoyed your telegram; Miss Jordan was delighted over it. She has had another talk with Charlie. It is great fun for her, but must be annoying to you.'

'I have not seen any paragraph, except some very pleasant ones.'

'Oh, this isn't a pleasant one, but sorry I told you of it.'

'Where is it?'

'Oh, never mind if you have not seen it, but come in; I and the wife are up here, left the children at Netherleigh. Do come and tell us all about your London affair. By the way, have you heard any rumours about our friend Bain?'

'Not my friend.'

'No, just so, only a *façon de parler*, but have you heard anything? There are ugly rumours.'

'He has been spending freely lately.'

'Betting heavily too; but I mean anything connected with that Nine Club.'

'Nothing.'

'Why, you know nothing! Are you a hermit?'

'Almost, in Greyborough.'

'I suppose you don't know that meek-faced curate of ours is gone?'

'What, Mr Nicholas Dawne?'

'The reverend gentleman of that cognomen.'

'Left Netherleigh!'

'Yes. Fraulein is not so pious now, and I'm glad of it. Mrs Hawthorne was quite troubled about that matter; that girl seems to want to love everything that's weakly. Children, and birds, and curates; even that poor little Busteed she talks with until he half believes she is in love with him.'

'But was there nothing in that? Mr Dawne seemed in earnest.'

'Oh, he was bitten, but his aunt wasn't.'

'And has the man no more pluck than that?'

'Did he look plucky now?'

'Yes, but Fraulein. Mr Hawthorne, did she—well—was she—'

'Oh, you must question Mrs Hawthorne if it's of any interest to you. Come and see us. Glad you have not seen the paragraph don't look for it; or bother your head about it. Sorry I told you,' and with a hearty handshake he was gone.

The paragraph did not worry Geoffrey, but his friend's news did. Hilda Jordan jilted by that meek-faced imitation priest; why, the girl was worth a hundred such parcels of weak, deceptive humanity. Had all her knowledge and reading, love of beauty, only led her to fall in love with this weakling? or was it all that yearning to succour what was weak? a yearning that would quickly turn to some other object, and that was by no means love, but 'pity that's a degree to love.'

He turned and went on with his work, cataloguing an exhibition of pictures his firm was shortly to hold, but bits of Art description broke off in thoughts of that sea-coast walk at Netherleigh. He would like to go down and hear about this from her own lips; she had been pleased with his telegram, she had been talking with his good friend Charlie, quite excuse enough; and she was alone with the children. But his thoughts were interrupted effectually by the entrance of the senior partner, who saluted him with,—

'Good-morning, Mr Lowther, what are you on this morning?'

'The catalogue, sir.'

'Oh, yes, good, good. But come in. I want to speak to you,' and he flourished a paper he had in his hand and went into his inner office.

'What's up now?' thought Geoffrey, and his heart sunk as he thought, surely there is nothing in that paragraph they are talking about to upset him, just as all things seemed going so smoothly; and rage bubbled up in his mind at the continuous baiting of the malignant clique, but he put his work up together and followed his employer into the office.

'Have you seen this, Mr Lowther?' He spoke angrily. 'This morning's *Gazette*.'

'No, I have no time to read the local papers.'

'Ah, work in the morning, I suppose?'

Geoffrey felt dismissal was coming.

'Well, read it—read that. We don't like paragraphs like that about our business. Read it,' and he pushed the paper into his hand. A great cross was against a paragraph. 'I had that put in my letter-box this

morning, delivered expressly by hand. Read it, man.'

Geoffrey read:—'An article has lately appeared in a magazine on "Artists and their Studios," signed by Geoffrey Lowther, who, as our readers know, is a shop assistant in the firm of ———, picture dealers in Greyborough. When this writer has had a little more experience, and has perhaps met with some of our famous artists, he will probably write a better article on the subject.' He looked up at the partner and said,—

'I am not to blame for this appearing, sir.'

'To blame! Where is their editor to let such a note as that appear? I'll never take the paper again. Look here, Lowther, they shall never be able to write such a paragraph again. You are no longer our assistant,' and he dashed the paper on the floor.

'But, sir! think—'

'Think! I won't think! You shall be a partner!' Geoffrey gasped.

'We've thought and talked enough about it, and that,' and he put his foot on the paper, 'settles it. You have served us well and I know your anxieties. We will settle details later on, but from this day you are our partner;' and he held out his hand, that Geoffrey took, whilst his eyes were moist with the sudden reaction. Then he thought of his journey North. Would this prevent it?'

'Prevent it? Why, it is your wide knowledge that has so helped us. Go by all means, only we must limit you to so many months in the year.'

'Months!'

'Well, you may want months, but weeks if you

like. You shall be free as a barrister for your journalistic work. I won't detain you any longer. I hope neither of us will regret this morning's work.'

Geoffrey went back to his old desk, but the Art descriptive paragraphs would not come; his brain was too full, and the words of Sir George Reid, the President of the Scotch Academy, kept ringing in his ears, when, as a poor lad he received two-and-sixpence for his weekly wage instead of two shillings, 'Oh, winna ma mither be pleased!' and he seemed to link his 'mither's' pleasure with the little journey he intended to take to Netherleigh.

It was some days before he could secure time even in early evening to run down to the little seaside resort, but the days passed all too quickly. He began to disagree entirely with the French pessimist who described life in the four mournful lines,—

'On entre, on crie,
C'est la vie.
On crie, on sort,
C'est la mort.'

Why, even his blind sister took life joyfully, and oh, her joy at her brother's onward march in life, and that life now seemed to him full of great probabilities; but one thing he determined upon, the business side should not kill the happiness and joy in the artistic life.

At last, but a few days before he was to again leave Greyborough on a wide journey, he got away on a soft spring evening to Netherleigh. When he arrived at the house where he had lived through some of the pleasantest moments of his life, for there he met with those to whom he could ever speak of his hopes when

all seemed so impossible of attainment, all was very quiet. No children were romping on the lawn, and a sudden fear came over him that there was illness there.

He was shown into the balcony room, and it was filled with the glory of the western sky. The house seemed terribly quiet, but the maid told him 'Frowline would be down d'reckly;' so she was not ill, and in a few moments she came suddenly but silently in upon him, exclaiming,—

'Why, Mr Lowther, this is good of you! I thought I should not get a talk again, and I knew you were going away. This is kind; let me get you some tea.'

'Why is the house so quiet? I hope no one is ill.'

'Quiet, is it quiet? Oh, I was putting Baby and Midge to bed, and the rest are doing their lessons.'

'And you manage to keep them so quiet.' But she rang the bell and ordered up tea, taking no notice of his compliment.

'And so you are going all away to Russia and writing on your Art. Ah, I read something the other day that made me think of you. Shall I say it?'

'Do.'

> 'In through the crowds, forcing his way to the front,
> Forcing with kindly and calm yet persistent power;
> Bearing the gibes, and bearing the scorn and the brunt
> Of envy and jealousy; awaiting the triumph hour.'

'Why did that make you think of me?' he asked.

'Why, haven't they gibed and taunted you? Oh, you don't know all they have said, and I'm not going to tell you. Why, I have not seen you since you sent us that telegram. I made the children cry hurrah.'

'Why are you so good to me?'

'Oh, I like a man—oh, here's the tea! Now do tell me, have you seen that horrid little Charlie since you came back? His stupidity is *ganz kollossal.*'

'I do not wish to meet him, but suppose I shall have to do so.'

'Oh, be kind to him; he has done you really so much good.'

'Well, to one who writes, every type of character is interesting.'

'He is one of the first of the knows.'

'How do you mean?' asked Geoffrey.

'Why, you know the four Arab "knows," don't you?'

'I fear I do not.'

'Then you are one of the knows.'

'But tell me the four.'

'Well, number one—He who knows not, and knows not he knows not, he is a fool, shun him. Number two—He who knows not, and knows he knows not, he is simple, teach him.

'Is that why you taught me German?' he interjected.

'Oh, be quiet! Number three—He who knows, and knows not he knows, he is asleep, wake him. And number four—He who knows and knows he knows, he is wise, follow him. And I do believe you are a number four know.'

'What if I asked you to follow me?'

'What, to Russia? No, thank you. I should be in Siberia in a month.'

'Do you know your Arab proverb brings one to my mind that your friend Mr Dawne always made me think of: it is as true as yours, but a deeper thought.'

'Do you think we had better go deeper?' she asked, but he was glad to see she did not flinch at the name.

'He is gone, is he not?' he asked.

'Yes, poor fellow! What was your proverb?'

'But—shall we go deeper?'

'Oh, I should like to hear it.'

'God is unknown to those who think they know Him, and known to those who know, they know Him not.'

'That is indeed deeper,' she said. 'Why do you quote that of Mr Dawne?'

'Do you think he was honest?' He determined to probe her deeply. But for what end?

'I really don't know. Oh, please, don't talk about him: he's gone. I want to talk about your work. Mrs Hawthorne tells me you are a partner now. Are you going to let that stop your writing?'

'I hope not.'

'Don't, don't,' she said. 'You must go on; write books, something that will live—real books, flesh and blood.'

'Why, you remind me of Verestchagin,' he said.

'When did you meet him?'

'At a reception in town. He was talking with me of Art—of all Art. "The people want life. They want real flesh and blood." Your very words, and he took hold of my hand, and as it were, tore pieces off it. "There," he said, handing me the pieces, "give them that, give them that."'

'Why don't you?' she asked, and she was the solid, earnest woman, not the vivacious, laughing girl. 'You will some day.'

'And I will ask you to read the proofs.'

'Oh, I shall be too severe. If the Moslems say artists will have to supply souls to their pictures up there, I say novelists must supply them to their characters.'

A sound of clattering on the stairs and a tap at the door, with voices saying, 'May we come in?' stopped their talk, and in ran Dorothy, Ruth, Bobby and Edgar, and the littlest clambered on the young girl's knees and Geoffrey had no further chance for quiet talk with her. This pleasant, curious chat, such as he had rarely with men, and never elsewhere with women, the savour of it lingered long in his mind, but he was a little worried as to the meaning of her pity for the Rev. Nicholas Dawne.

CHAPTER IV

'THERE IS A PROVIDENCE'

IT was on a clear sharp night in later spring that Geoffrey Lowther found himself pacing the deck of the s.s. *Berlin* lying in Parkeston Harbour. The last rush of passengers down the gangway had not come, and he was alone on the deck with the deep dome of heaven, the 'palm of God,' above him, and away in the west shone, with startling brilliancy, Venus, whilst eastward, away over the sea, was rising in silvery haze the moon just past the full. He had time to think of all life had yielded him of late. The eastern light grew and grew until all the harbour lay glittering as molten silver, and then he turned in his stride and saw the steely glitter of Venus, the goddess that had played him false. 'Well, I hardly know that,' he said to himself, but a rush of a train on the quay warned him the last train was coming in, and soon with a hurry-scurry and a rush they came stumbling along the wooden quay head, hustling down the gangways, and all quiet was gone; the harsh whistle blurted out over his head, and he went down below to watch the people and see who was on board. As he passed the chief steward's a man was getting his berth number—a

Dogberry. He laid his hand on the man's shoulder, saying, 'Is war declared with Holland?'

'Hullo, old chap, going across? War, no—no such luck.' It was Captain Hodson. 'I'm going to Berlin *locum tenens* for a bit; that's all right,' he said to the steward. And then to Geoffrey, 'Let's go on deck. Where are you bound?'

'Hamburg for Stockholm.'

'What, through the canal?'

'Then Russia, and back through Berlin. Will you be there in a month's time?'

'Hope not. It's Mitchell is ill. Don't like Berlin. Nor does Mitchell.'

'No. But it is a good berth.'

'It's a pity to always rub against the pile of the velvet.'

'Precious little velvet about the Berliner; but Mitchell does make 'em look rough. Well, he's ill, poor chap; look him up when you come through. I hope I shall be gone. There's an expedition up north of Tanganyika I want to join,' and he went into a description of the plucky fellows who were stretching Britain's territory, Empire-making by pluck and endurance, as they forged ahead swiftly over the North Sea, where the Vikings' long galleys had sailed triumphantly ages ago. The crisp salt air and biting spray made the old Viking blood still in them tingle and vivify, for they too were no fire-side grumblers at Britain's decadence.

Next day they separated, and Geoffrey went on his way. Art studying and people studying; Swedes and Finns and Russians; being well received as an English man and an English writer wherever he set

foot. Gird at England as they may in their papers, the people of all nations have a respect for the nation that has taught the world so much, and the individual Englishman who knows how to conform to the customs of the land wherein he is a guest is treated more than friendly, even cordially.

But all the incidents that happened in his wide circuit have no bearing on the lives of any in Greyborough; not a dozen in the whole city followed his work, or even knew of his absence. Matters were growing acute again over one of those subjects that they had argued and wrangled over for generations; and even Sir Henry Habgood had been taking his seat as Alderman, that he still retained, to watch over his own interests.

It was more than a month since he had met Hodson on the Harwich steamer, and Geoffrey Lowther was tramping through a pine forest on the banks of the Elbe, some twenty miles above Dresden. Alone amidst the solemn aisles of the pines, his footfall hushed to a low thud on the soft spines shed from the branches above. The resinous scent of the spring growth was pleasant to his nostrils, and he drank in the crisp air and pine odour as he issued on to a vast amphitheatre of gigantic pillared rocks and stood before a scene that was awe-inspiring in its beauty.

The great rock piers looked like giants seated round a vast arena in which other giants strove for the mastery.

As he stood and looked, a lad's voice broke in upon his thoughts with the question in German,—

'Can you tell me, sir, the road to Görlitz?'

'Görlitz! Why, it is a hundred miles east of this.'

'I know, sir, but I am walking there.'

Geoffrey looked at him; he was one of those wandering apprentices with bundle and stick one meets on the German country roads. 'But where have you come from?' he asked the lad.

'Weimar, sir.'

'Why, a hundred miles west. What are you going to Görlitz for?'

'My father is a shoemaker there and I have been learning my trade at Weimar.'

'And now walking home?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Well,' said Geoffrey, 'I can tell you the direction as I have just come from Görlitz; but you had better follow this path and get into the road,' and Geoffrey led the way on round the vast amphitheatre, and the lad fell behind him; but ere long he heard his voice at his side with the query,—

'May I walk with you, sir? I am very lonely.'

'Ja gewiss,' said Geoffrey, and together they tramped on, the lad talking of his work, and his tramp down to Weimar, and his life there; then suddenly he looked up in Geoffrey's face and said,—

'Do you know Graf Moltke is dead?'

'What!'

'He died yesterday they said in Dresden. But I don't think it is true.'

'If it is true I must be in Berlin at once,' thought Geoffrey, 'and wire I am there;' and he turned to the lad and asked, 'Where did you hear this?'

'It was in the papers, but there were no flags up.'

Geoffrey turned and shook hands with the lad,

saying, 'Well, good-bye. Glückliche Reise, I must get back to Dresden.'

And so meeting this lonely apprentice lad in a solemn pine forest, and kindly helping him, turned the whole course of Geoffrey Lowther's life.

He got into Dresden that night. The news was true, and the next morning he was in Berlin; and passing out under the Brandenburg Thor across to the General Staff Residence, he saw a group of policemen, and asking why they were there, was told Count Moltke's lying-in-state was preparing, and showing his card, saying he was an English correspondent, he was passed up the stairs, and was thus the first to stand and look on that placid marble face, masking the once busy brain that had so changed the map of Europe.

He obtained all particulars from the colonel in command, and the date of the funeral, and then went across the Thiergarten to the house of Hodson's friend Mitchell, whom he remembered he had met at the Jubilee Art Exhibition.

He found Hodson was gone, but Mitchell was still very weak, and dreading a relapse. He greeted Geoffrey heartily. 'Are you positively fixed for this?' he asked. 'Can you help me?'

Geoffrey had already wired to the *Whitehall Gazette*, and expected the reply was at the Hotel du Nord.

'They won't want much. If you could do the preparations and scenes in the city, and let me have a quiet rest to-day, I think I can manage the funeral, if I don't break down,' he said sadly. 'Help me if you can, old fellow. I thought your Art articles capital.'

Geoffrey hastened back to his hotel. The wire was there: five hundred words the day before, not more than a thousand of the funeral: but an hour's writing. Yes, he could help Mitchell with the descriptive work, and he soon got his purple police pass and was hard at work on the scenes in and around the General Staff building.

When all was over and he had completed his own Art work, he said good-bye to Mitchell, who, as he shook hands with him, said, 'I told them you had helped me. They wired how pleased they were. I wasn't going to take credit for your work, old man.'

Geoffrey thanked him heartily for his honest kindliness, and next morning was running away for Amsterdam and the Hague for notes on Rembrandt, and ere a week was over he was back again in Greyborough, revelling in all the lovely West country scenery that encircled it, after his days amidst the flat, sandy plains of Northern Europe.

CHAPTER V

'UNTO THE HARVEST'

WHEN Donald Bain woke up somewhat late on the morning after the reception in Park Lane he slowly came to the understanding with himself that unless he made a *coup* in some way things were in Queer Street with him. But he did not believe what that fool Lowther had told him; so later in the day he made his way to the residence of Sir Henry Habgood.

'Her ladyship is not at home,' was the answer to his inquiry.

Donald felt this was the usual fib, so looking at his watch he said, 'I think you must be mistaken. Would you inquire and take my card to Lady Habgood if she is in?'

The man looked at the card and disappeared, but in a very few minutes he returned with the curt words, 'Her ladyship is not at home,' repeated, Donald thought, in a very emphatic manner.

'Is she driving in the Park?' he asked.

'I am not cognisant of her ladyship's movements,' was the pompous reply.

What did this mean? He felt sure she was at home and had refused to see him. He determined to stroll about near and watch to see if she went out

or returned. For half an hour he paced the pavement, and then he saw a closed carriage drive round to the door and Evelyn come out and drive away, but not towards the Park. She had refused to see him. What had Geoffrey Lowther told her to make this sudden change. 'God, I'll kill him!' he muttered, but the killing of Geoffrey Lowther was a matter that had to be put off. The first job was to get money in some way or 'Greyborough will be too small a place for me to stay in.' The funds he had raised were going fast. His landlord, a good-hearted retired professional man, had been put off repeatedly; and at last, just before he had made this venture for funds, he had quieted him with the invention that he was going to Scotland shortly to get in some delayed payments on the mortgages he held. His lawyers had not been looking things up sharply enough, and he intended to put his affairs into other hands.

But as the weeks flew on, Donald's landlord received no cash and saw but little of Donald night or day; and men noted that the old smartness was giving place to slovenliness, and his pals and chums shrugged their shoulders and hinted to one another that the tradesmen of 'The Nine's' Club were asking who were the responsible members, for accounts were not paid. But the few solid members found it difficult to meet Donald, as their haunts were not his, and the club's reputation for ruining youngsters had, of late, so permeated Greyborough business gossip that they thought best to cease from membership.

Geoffrey Lowther on his return heard but little

of all this; he was still deeply occupied in work upon the scenes and art galleries he had visited, and his own business. His income had not been much increased by his partnership, but it gave him renewed interest in the business; but he still hoped and longed for the time when literary work should alone occupy his time, and this now so held him often in the morning, that he was glad to take a short cut from his home through a corner of the town through which at night it was hardly safe to venture.

It was nearly eleven o'clock on one bright early summer morning when he dived off the curving main road into this purlieu of clustered little houses. The colony of plunder and vice seemed asleep, and he was hurrying on, when ahead of him, in a narrow lane, where a dead wall was on one hand, a man and woman issued from a house and went on ahead of him. He soon was near them, but when within a dozen yards of the couple the man, who was walking unsteadily, suddenly turned round, saying,—

'No, I shall not go. I positively refuse to—' And he stopped in his halting, swaggering speech. It was Donald Bain and he was face to face with Lowther.

'You devil!' he hissed at him. 'Now I've caught you. Hold him, Polly! Damn him, he ruined me!'

The two blocked the narrow alley. A scream from the woman would bring out a dozen associates. Ahead he would soon be out of this nest of infamy; he would not turn back. He pulled himself together, and with the words, 'Be careful,' to the woman, said, 'Let me pass, Bain.'

'Pass! Bain! I said I would kill you. You

—' and he lunged forth a blow with all his force, but Geoffrey easily avoided it. Bain's fist and face met the dead wall, and the drink that was in him sent him staggering in a heap. Geoffrey passed on, and looking back saw the woman trying to lift up the aristocratic form of Donald Bain.

He hurried on, determined to try this short cut no more, yet sick at heart at the depths to which this man, enemy as he was, had fallen.

He told no one of his adventure, he would not throw a stone at so wretched a foe, but, as so often occurs when the mind is full of a subject, on that afternoon Mr Hawthorne called in with a friend to look at some pictures in their gallery, and standing chatting there, suddenly said,—

'What has become of Donald Bain lately? He seems to have disappeared from Greyborough. I wonder that man never got married.'

'Oh,' said the friend, 'he laughs at that idea; says he will never give up his liberty to a woman.'

And yet, thought Geoffrey, he has given up liberty of body and soul for the vilest of women. Yet he held his peace, but from his soul went forth the prayer, 'God grant me some day, a true, pure wife,' and instinctively he turned to Mr Hawthorne and asked if his wife was well?

'Not too well,' was the reply; 'we go back to Netherleigh next week; come down and spend a week-end with us if your terrible work will let you.'

But before that week-end arrived more than a month had elapsed, and then all Greyborough was

agitated greatly by a wretched rumour that the body of Donald Bain had been picked up on the Scottish coast. For weeks he had been missing from Greyborough; he had gone on board a Scotch steamer to look after those mythical mortgages, and none had troubled whether the gay, swaggering entertainer was dead or alive, save the members of 'The Nine.' They found the subscriptions had been paid, but not the accounts, and his landlord held a cheque for his rent that was but waste paper. Rumour settled into actuality when, at the inquest upon the half-decomposed body of the once handsome Donald, a key was found in the pocket with wards at either end. The one end to open the door of 'The Nine's' Club, the other to unlock the whisky, whose praises he had so often shouted to the noisy applause of insensate Greyborough, and this was the end of it all—besotted, penniless, a lonely plunge into the waters of the Irish sea, whose waves threw up his body upon the shores of his native land, the mask torn now for ever from his face.

What now, thought Geoffrey, would Evelyn Maitland think of this unscrupulous man into whose clutch she had perchance nearly fallen? What right had he to even think she would have fallen into his power? Her being with him in Park Lane was nought. Sir Henry was probably away, or late at the House, and glad that his young wife should be amused. Had he not acted rashly in accusing her? What had she done? Nothing that Society would even start at. So he tried to exonerate her from all blame, but it forced

itself the remembrance of her face in that dim light, and the strange pressure of her hand as she drove away, and was she not the wife? . . . wife, no. No woman is the wife of a man she hates and despises. And his thoughts went back to the days when she had talked with him on Art, and the glories of Nature, and beauty in life, when her whole aspirations seemed to be towards the higher life of intellectual beauty and soulful good. How had the one step downward dragged her from this happiness of mind and soul into the slough of degradation and misery, that no rich dress or costly jewels could hide from those who looked below the Society surface? She now must wear the mask that had been torn from the visage of Donald Bain, and be to the world what she was not.

The very thinking of all this pretence and deception called up in his mind the laughing, frank face of Hilda Jordan; the unstudied laugh and blunt, outspoken words that seemed to lay bare the very thoughts of others, echoed in his ears: and the moments when they had sat together on the lawn seat at Netherleigh, and all the deep talks they had had on Lessing's wisdom and Heine's cynicism, and on pictures and sonnets, seemed like a draught of salt sea air after a choking gulp of the air of a fœtid town slum: and as he strolled slowly home that night he dwelt in a happy mood on all the pleasant hours he had spent with her. He had scarcely noticed them at the time, but looking back on them now he saw how full of deep mind pleasure they had been, with no bitter after-taste,

no regrets. 'Would I could have more of them?' was the conclusion of his thinking, and yet not quite, for as he neared his home the face of Evelyn Maitland, as it had been in her Madonna purity, came back to him. It was of a higher type then, and to his artist's instincts it appealed to him more than did the laughing, child-like grace of Hilda.

The next morning a joyful surprise awaited him—a letter from the editor-in-chief of the famous journal for which poor Mitchell was the correspondent. He wrote asking Geoffrey if he could again go across and take up Mr Mitchell's work, as a relapse had again almost incapacitated him, and he had expressed a wish for Lowther to come over, and the editor added that the work he had done had so pleased the proprietors that, in strict confidence, he had been asked to inquire if Mr Lowther felt inclined to accept the position if anything prevented Mr Mitchell, their most valued correspondent for so many years, again renewing work.

'That means they expect his death, poor fellow,' thought Geoffrey; and then his sudden sad thought gave place to a leap of joy. Here indeed was a position! Why, almost equal to an ambassador's! Could it possibly be true that it was offered to him? The poor boy, striving and struggling to hold a home together, fighting and working on restlessly. Had his work brought him this honour? Then flashed the thought, Evelyn Maitland even would have accepted the man who held that position. It was a sense of triumph that forced this thought to his brain, but there followed it the determination

to go down to Netherleigh that night and tell his friends there of this tremendous success.

But something was to happen that day in Greyborough that would drive even the thought of this wonderful letter from his mind.

There had been a great agitation for some time past amidst some young ardents, who did not see beneath the meaning of all the roundabout talk and no action of some rulers of Greyborough; and this agitation had led up to a debate that involved deeply the interests of Sir Henry Habgood, and the papers stated that morning he was leaving his more important work in the Commons—Geoffrey smiled as he read this—to come down and speak upon the sadly suicidal policy of the action now being urged upon the citizens.

The debate waxed hot in the old hall where many a historic scene had been enacted. Past generations of Greyborough celebrities and English worthies looked down on the crowded scene where not many months before plain Henry Habgood had shaken hands with a royal duke and his chain of office had come clattering to the ground. He was seated in his place not far from that spot, clutching sometimes the back of a chair near him, for the debate seemed going for action; and if that action was taken, much property he was the owner of would lose all chance of trebling its value. He would lose the chance of becoming, perhaps, a millionaire, perhaps a peer. He was excited, but he delayed speaking. He knew the subject. He had spoken on it scores of times; he wanted to crush all their arguments.

At last, late in the afternoon, he rose, held fast to his chair and began slowly his speech. He stamped, as had been his wont, on the younger members who had dared oppose his so often-expressed ideas. The older members who were in line with him applauded; he waxed warmer.

'Had they the true interests of Greyborough at heart, rushing into foolish action heedlessly?' He shifted his position, stepped forward a pace, as though he would take his old position as Mayor. 'Let us think of the welfare of the town!—of its future greatness! — and not be misled by rash statements.' He stretched forth his hand, and in slow, emphatic words, his voice trembling with emotion as they thought, he said, 'The citizens know how I have always striven for their good welfare. Now I am giving up my time that I may be of benefit to the city I have lived in. The arguments used are false, built up from false statements. You will ruin—will ruin'— he clutched at a chair near him—'will ruin,' again he muttered, seemed suddenly to shrink together, and fell in a heap on the floor.

Those near him rushed to him, brushed back the long grey beard that had enveloped his face; it was livid; the jaw fell. Sir Henry Habgood was dead. The omen of the clattering, falling chain was fulfilled. Evelyn Maitland was free. Save that she was Lady Habgood.

So thought Geoffrey Lowther when in the evening, after he had heard the tragic story, he got into the train to go down to Netherleigh.

CHAPTER VI

THE REAPING

THE pleasant undulating scenery of meadow and woodland, rock and river peeps, laid not their hold on Geoffrey Lowther that evening. His eyes were turned inward. 'These be thy gods, O Greyborough!' kept recurring to his brain, and what of his own life? Was he working to nobler ends than those to which these clay gods, now crumbled into dust, had led the people around them, riches, or *la vie pour rire?* Was he fashioning his life, moulding circumstances to his will, or letting petty ends seize upon his mind and occupy his time? Now in this new position that was opening out to him he would speak literally to millions; the responsibility was awful; and that old interjective Arab prayer came to his lips, 'God guide the ship safely.'

One will want guiding and steadying, and who over there shall I turn to for a confidential talk? He would miss the only true friend to whom he had ever turned—John Hawthorne, the thinking man, the man who had helped him to scorn pettiness and fight on to higher intellectual ends.

But now he could tell him of this end, nay, beginning, to his work. He was approaching Netherleigh,

where so many happy hours had been spent. How he would miss the breath of the western sea away there on the flat sand plains. And his thoughts went back to the day when he sold that picture of Low Point. Nay, it was Evelyn Maitland had sold it. Had this success come to him then, would she have been his wife?

Why not now? flashed the thought. If he obtained permanently this position it was one she would glory in. She was free—free from the man who had bought her with his gold—free from the man who had nearly attained a hold over her from which there had been no escape. But the very thought that death, violent, sudden death had so set her free, sent a blaze of light into her weak soul. The glamour she had thrown over him was gone. She was free indeed, but she was Lady Habgood. Heaven had saved her a double degradation. Yet a strange longing to speak to her again seemed to cling to him, repress it as he would.

Once more he walked up that hill and looked out on the sea plain. He walked slowly, full of thought, when suddenly he felt a warm, tiny little hand pushed into his, and looking down he saw Baby Hawthorne, the littlest of all the children, and alone.

'Oo didn't see me,' said the child.

'See you, no!' He lifted her up and kissed her, saying, 'Why, where do you come from all alone?'

'Mustn't tell.'

But a titter of laughter behind the roadside hedge betrayed other children, and catching up the little

one he ran back to where a gate led into a field, and then he saw the group of children with Hilda, all clustered by the hedge, and he was soon amidst them, they all laughing at how baby had startled him, and how well she had done their behest.

When the hubbub and laughter at the little jest had subsided, Fraulein said very quietly, 'How long a time it is since you were down here!'

'But a few months.'

'Ah, you have been round Europe and seen so much. We have been here.'

'Making people happy,' interjected Geoffrey.

'But people won't be made happy,' she retorted.

'No. Man always is, and never will be blessed; it's a pretty true contortion of an old saying.' Strange, he thought, how this girl always seems to lift talk out of the common ruts, and he looked at her face. It was in repose, no dimples or ripples of laughter. How thoughtful it seemed! He had never before so seen it. He would miss these pleasant talks, although they had been very far between of late.

'Do you know I may be leaving Greyborough,' he said suddenly, after a silence that had driven the children to run on ahead, in their bubbling glee, down off the hedge-shielded path on to the beach below.

She looked up at him. 'But you are now a partner?'

'But suppose a better thing even than that were to offer?'

'Not your wish—your post in Berlin.'

'You have guessed it.'

'Oh, I am so— No, I'm not glad, we shall lose you altogether. I'm sorry.'

'You said you would congratulate me.'

'That's a long time ago.'

'What has happened to change your ideas?'

'Oh, lots, lots. We shall have no more reading, for there is not another soul here comes for German. Oh, I shall go to Rome.'

'Rome!' exclaimed Geoffrey. 'Why Rome?'

'Oh, I've got to marry someone in Rome—so my mother writes.'

'Marry someone? But I thought the Rev. Nicholas Dawne—'

She looked up into his face inquiringly, and with a curious smile on her face said solemnly,—

'And who 'mid e'en the fools, but feels that half the joy is in the race,
For wealth and fame and place. Nor sighs when comes, success to crown the chase.'

'So when you had enmeshed him you were tired of that chase. Was that kind?'

'It is he who would have enmeshed me,' and she laughed her old, gurgling, joyous laugh.

'The biter bit, eh?'

'Oh, he still sends me presents—such nice books.'

'Does he?' said Geoffrey, and somehow he thought he would like to go for that pale-faced curate. 'But this Rome—you are joking?'

'I'm not,' and she opened her eyes very wide at his words. 'You see there is a young cousin of mine who has done marvellously well there in business—,

a carriage on the Pincio, and all sorts of goodies —and I'm to marry him. Oh, it's settled at home.'

'But not at Netherleigh.'

'Dear old Netherleigh! I've been very happy here. Mrs Hawthorne has been a mother to me—ay, more than a mother,' she added with a sad, solemn expression.

What was there in her home that made her so speak? It was these moments of deep sadness that showed the hidden depths of her character that rarely came to the surface.

'Do you know this cousin?' he asked.

'Marriages are arranged by parents in Italy,' she answered.

'And you prefer them arranged by heaven, English fashion?'

'Hell sometimes manages these,' she said boldly. Her words drove his thoughts to Evelyn Maitland. He said,—

'Do you know old Sir Henry Habgood is dead?'

'Dead! Why, he was to come to Greyborough to-day.'

'He came, and dropped dead there.'

She stopped in her walk, and facing him, said very slowly,—

'Then Miss Evelyn Maitland is a free woman.'

'You mean Lady Habgood,' he said emphatically.

A smile went over her face as he said the words. What had she divined of his thoughts? It was a strangely pleased expression that lit up her eyes; it seemed to give another aspect to her face, that was

always so pleasant a study, and as he looked she said, the smile assuming insistence upon an answer,—

'Will you marry Miss Maitland? You will be rich now.'

Her whole face seemed to reveal itself to him at the question. He had never seen her before, that little *svelte* figure. The frank, open face, the soft contour of the neck, and those eyes that were waiting anxiously for an answer. He would have taken her hand, but there was no excuse. How his intent mind had closed his eyes; they were opened now. He wanted to take her little face in his hands, but he dare not. And she awaited his answer, the smile fading from her eyes. At last, though but seconds had passed, he said,—

'Miss Maitland—there is no Miss Maitland. I have little respect for Lady Habgood.'

'How could she have wedded him?' she exclaimed. 'Ugh!' and a shiver ran through her face and figure. Then she murmured, as though speaking to herself, 'I am so glad.'

He laid his hand upon her arm, his fingers went through the loop in the sleeve and rested on the vibrating, palpitating flesh; a strange tremor seemed to fill his whole body, and he could hardly ask the question, 'Why are you glad?'

'Oh, I am glad you have your wish.'

'No. You were glad I would not marry. Would you marry me? Not now, not yet. I am not safe of this position, but if I do get it, if there is some certainty of life before me, will you be my helpmeet?'

'But this is so *plötzlich*, so sudden. Why, when we read Lessing together—'

'I never saw *you*, but "*Wo das Herz reden darf, braucht es keiner Vorbereitung*."'*

'So, so! you remember that phrase?'

'You drilled me in it.'

'You *were* blind.'

'What, you liked me? Even then, poor fellow as I was.'

'You were a man—a working man. You made me respect you.' She looked up into his face, all laughter gone, and a look almost of reverence in her eyes.

He let go the soft, round arm, took both her hands.

'And you will be my wife? Only if I can give you this home I—'

'Must there be *that condition?*' she said archly.

He let go her hands, but her little form was in his arms. Body and lips met, and when he relaxed his hold they were two souls with but one heart, wedded to a double life, with a single aim—each other's good. A silence seized them for a few seconds, then the old, rippling laugh burst out from her lips as she said, 'You quite frightened me. The solid Geoffrey Lowther can love.'

'Then you accept me?'

'Was not that kiss enough?'

'Not a thousandth part enough,' and he took her hand, and onwards together they walked, wholly forgetful of the children, until a head came through

* When the heart dares to speak no preparation is needed.

the hedge and a voice called out, 'Come and build castles for us, Mr Lowther.'

'I am building them fast enough,' he answered.

'But they are not air castles,' said Hilda. 'Your foundations are too solid.'

EPILOGUE

It was springtime in Berlin. The birches were putting forth their tender green foliage against the sombre winter hues of the pines in the Thiergarten. Along the Sea of Marmora, as the Berliners had dubbed their Kaiser's monument-lined walk leading up to the Victory monument, groups of promenaders were strolling and chattering, revelling in the sudden burst of hot sunshine, that had given place to the cold easterly wind that for days had blown through the Brandenburg Thor with incisive cruelty. The summer was come, and remodelled Berlin, unlike the old days before '70, could breathe and enjoy Nature even in her midst.

Coming across from the Thor was a smart, well-set-up man in tall hat and frock coat, swinging a stick and humming a bit of Sullivan, which by no means proved him to be English; he cut across the tram lines, and striking a slanting alley got into the marble sea, and then stopped and looked up and down it. In the far distance was the figure of a little lady, dressed in a soft, fawn-coloured material, contrasting strongly with the gay ribbons of a Spreewald nurse, who was pushing a child's carriage before her.

He darted off, raising his hat now and then to greetings as he passed, but, as though divining his coming, the lady halted and awaited him.

How she was altered. The little governess, Hilda Jordan, a quiet, stately little woman. But as her husband drew near the old dimples came, and it was the old smile back again.

'Well,' she said, 'have you seen the Ambassador?'

'Yes, and he quite agrees with my articles; things will quiet down if we are not continually rubbing people the wrong way.'

'Oh, a war would be terrible! It is horrible to think of.'

'And we won't think of it. I think it impossible. How is the son and heir?'

'Oh, in such a pickle! He's been grovelling in the sand. Come and see him,' and they quickened their steps to the child's carriage on ahead.

'Ha, he is in a mess! But it is not Netherleigh mud. Had Mr Craven come when you left?'

'Yes; and there is an important wire from Petersburg.'

'Oh, palace party worrying again? They will force the Czar's hand.'

'His wife won't let them.'

'They will wear her out, or worse. Any more acceptations?'

'Yes, I shall have my rooms full. Carl Becker and Werner are coming.'

'Good, good. I want you to learn as much as you can from Maslovski, he is playing a double game and knows both sides; he has just come from

Tiflis. Oh, Sir Edward's son has promised to look in; he is stationed at Algiers. Just run up for a holiday.'

'Am I to talk to him?'

'Well, it might be useful; any combinations or developments. Ha, here we are!' and they entered the little garden of a villa looking out on to the Thiergarten; and giving his wife a kiss on the threshold he ran up the stairs and entered a large room with chairs, and a writing-table piled with papers and documents, books and atlases. On the walls were hung engravings, and at the end of the room were portraits of H.M. the Queen of England and the Kaiser, the frames draped in the two tricolors.

'Ah, Mr Craven,' he said to his secretary, who was seated at the writing-table, 'I hear we have a wire from Petersburg.'

'Working out as you thought,' said the secretary.

'Good. Now we can get on up to a certain point and wire remainder at last moment. Oh, you will be at my wife's reception to-night, Mr Craven?'

'Mrs Lowther has kindly invited me,' was the answer, and the pair set to work silently upon a pile of Russian, Austrian and German papers, marking probable matter for reference, when suddenly their labour was broken in upon by an inrush of Hilda, waving a letter.

'Who do you think is in Berlin?'

'Hilda! Hilda! this is against all rule.'

'I don't care. I couldn't hold it back. I must go at once; they must be here to-night.'

'Well, whoever it is, leave us alone. I must absolutely—'

'But you don't know who it is! Look at this! Netherleigh! Now, do you mind my breaking the rules?'

'What, Mr Hawthorne?'

'Yes, and his wife! The dear. I am delighted. They will arrive this morning. Won't a talk be delicious?'

'Well, we must forgive the stopping our work for once. But do run away now.'

'Oh, those terrible despatches!' said Hilda as she disappeared. But she gave a wave of the letter at the door, and she said 'Hurrah!' when she had closed it.

And so that evening, amidst the carriages that drove up to the gate was a droschke with a white-hatted coachman; and Mr and Mrs John Hawthorne of Greyborough mingled with the little crowd of artists, authors, journalists and diplomatists who were received by Mr Geoffrey Lowther, the correspondent of the *London Despatch*, and his charming wife. The music was of the choicest, the conversation in half-a-dozen languages full of interest; but it was growing late in the night before Geoffrey was able to get a few moments' quiet talk with his good friend.

'You are living a full life now, a little different to Greyborough,' said Mr Hawthorne.

'Yes, but that was a good training—incessant work then, makes incessant work now easy—and this work is light, for I love it.'

'And is this part of your incessant work?'

asked Mrs Hawthorne. 'Very pleasant indeed I should call it. But Hilda has learnt Russian, I hear.'

'Part of the very pleasant work, Mrs Hawthorne,' said Geoffrey, with a smile.

'Opportunity is always kind to the industrious,' said her husband.

'How happy Fraulein—I mean Mrs Lowther—seems. We shall always call her Fraulein.'

'And how are all at Greyborough?' asked Geoffrey. 'Have they nearly forgotten me?'

'I think so. They were glad to be rid of you. Your good friend, Charlie Mudd, surpassed himself the other day over one of your articles, in which you referred to the *Kölnische Zeitung*—"wherever that paper may be published," added Charlie. A friend pointed out that Köln was Cologne. "Yes, dear boy," said Charlie, "but this wasn't Köln, it was Kölnische."'

'And my mother?' asked Geoffrey of Mr Hawthorne.

'I called in at their new little home and they are so happy; but I must not give you their message here, it is too crowded.'

Some music in the adjoining room was just over and the guests came pouring into this room that opened into a conservatory, and so the little Greyborough group was divided.

Later on that night, when all the guests were gone, the Hawthornes were taken up into the nursery to look upon the chubby little heir, now sound asleep, and there Mrs Hawthorne gave the message of love from mother and blind sister.

When they too were gone, Geoffrey Lowther took his wife's hand and said earnestly,—

'As we have been blessed, so let us try and be a blessing; ay, to the world.'

He was right. A great English journalist may be a blessing, even to the world.

THE END

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